NATION

India's population estimated at 144 cr: UNFPA

≫ Page: 6 ≪

BUSINESS

'India not reaping benefits of demographic dividend'

≫ Page: 9 ≪

SPORTS

ELEVEN man PSG edge past Barca to Semis

≫ Page: 10 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in www.magzter.com 18 APRIL 2024 |THURSDAY|BENGALURU| 8 SHAWWAL, 1445 AH Vol 4 | Issue No 89| Pages: 8

# Curtains down on campaign as India gears to vote in 1st phase

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

Campaigning ended Wednesday evening for 102 Lok Sabha seats across 21 states and Union territories which will go to polls in the first phase on 19 April with top leaders of BJP-led NDA and the Opposition INDIA making a last-gasp effort to woo voters.

Leading the charge, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took whirlwind tours of various constituencies in the past few days, addressing rallies and holding roadshows.

Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and several of their cabinet colleagues, leaders of Congress such as Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi, and other parties also canvassed for their candidates.

BJP has come out all guns blazing at the INDIA bloc over corruption, dynasty politics and insulting the Constitution and Hinduism.

The Opposition leaders, in turn, have attacked the government over electoral bonds, alleged misuse of agencies, inflation and unemployment among other issues.

BJP in its manifesto prioritised development and welfare while shunning populist measures and contentious issues like the NRC.

In its 45-page manifesto titled 'Nyay Patra', Congress focused on five "pillars of justice" and 25 guarantees under them.

Modi, however, lambasted Congress manifesto saying it carries the imprint of the Muslim League with "every page reeking of breaking India".

> • BJP has come out all guns blazing at the INDIA bloc over corruption, dynasty politics and insulting the Constitution.

In 2019, the UPA had won 45 of these 102 seats and the NDA 41. Six of these seats have been redrawn as part of the delimitation exercise.

Polling will be held in all seats of Tamil Nadu (39), Uttarakhand (5), Arunachal Pradesh (2), Meghalaya (2), Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1), Mizoram (1), Nagaland (1), Puducherry (1), Sikkim (1) and Lakshadweep (1).

Besides, there will be voting in 12 seats in Rajasthan, 8 in Uttar Pradesh, 6 in Madhya Pradesh, 5 seats each in Assam and Maharashtra, 4 in Bihar, 3 in West Bengal, 2 in Manipur, and one seat each in Tripura, Jammu and Kashmir and Chhattisgarh.

Authorities in these constituencies have been directed to ensure that no outsider remains in these areas 48 hours before polling.

Any form of electioneering, public meetings, press conferences by political parties, interviews and panel discussions in electronic or print media have been strictly prohibited.

In Tamil Nadu, Chief Minister and DMK boss M K Stalin, on the last day of campaigning, described the polls as the "second freedom movement" and reiterated that the election is about deciding "whose regime must not continue" rather than who should capture power. \

He also alleged that Modi has ruined the nation for the sake of his "selfish politics". BJP Tamil Nadu unit president K Annamalai also held high-voltage campaigns.

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav addressed rallies in Saharanpur and Moradabad Wednesday in Uttar Pradesh.

*—PTI*

WE ARE HIRING

SUB-EDITOR
WEB EDITOR

Journalism degree preferred but not essential

Applicants with maximum 2 years of experience preferred. Freshers are encouraged to apply

SEND YOUR CV TO

asma@salar.news
anushreeirwin@gmail.com

## Sakshi Malik stars in TIME's 100 most influential people

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

Olympic medallist Indian wrestler Sakshi Malik has been listed among the 100 most influential people of 2024 by Time magazine. Sakshi, India's only female Olympic medallist in wrestling, has been honoured for her relentless fight against alleged sexual harassment of female wrestlers by former Wrestling Federation of India president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. Sakshi along with two-time World Championships bronze medallist Vinesh Phogat and Tokyo Olympics bronze winner Bajrang Punia spearheaded the protest against Singh at the Jantar Mantar here, demanding his arrest for intimidating and allegedly sexually harassing female grapplers of the country. The protest, which began in January last year, became a year-long battle against Singh drawing support and attention both in India and abroad.

*—PTI*

## Storm dumps record rain across UAE

**DUBAI, 17 APRIL**

The desert nation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) attempted to dry out Wednesday from the heaviest rain ever recorded there after a deluge flooded out Dubai International Airport, disrupting flights through the world's busiest airfield for international travel. The state-run WAM news agency called the rain Tuesday "a historic weather event" that surpassed "anything documented since the start of data collection in 1949." That's before the discovery of crude oil in this energy-rich nation then part of a British protectorate known as the Trucial States. Rain also fell in Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. However, the rains were acute across the UAE. The UAE, which heavily relies on energy-hungry desalination plants to provide water, conducts cloud seeding in part to increase its dwindling groundwater.*—PTI*

*>>>More on Page 6*

ELECTORAL BATTLEGROUND

# Gave hope in 2014, guarantee now: PM

Supporters cheer during a public meeting addressed by Narendra Modi ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, in Nalbari, on Wednesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

**NALBARI, 17 APRIL**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday asserted that he went to people with hope in 2014, trust in 2019 and guarantee in 2024.

Addressing an election rally at the Borkura ground here, he said that the birth celebrations of Lord Ram were being held in the temple at Ayodhya after 500 years with a 'Surya Tilak' ceremony.

Earlier in the day, Modi greeted people on the occasion of Ram Navami on Wednesday and said Ayodhya is in incomparable bliss as this is the first time the festival would be celebrated there after the consecration of the Ram temple.

Modi said that free ration will be provided to all without discrimination for the next five years.

Free treatment of up to Rs five lakh under the 'Ayushman Bharat' scheme will be given to people aged 70 and above.

Modi was here to campaign for NDA candidates of three constituencies- Asom Gana Parishad's Phani Bhushan Choudhury for Barpeta, United People's Party, Liberal nominee Jayanta Basumatary for Kokrajhar and BJP's Bijuli Kalita Medhi for Guwahati, who all were present at the rally.

*—PTI*

## Modi, Shah to visit K'taka on 20 April

**BENGALURU, 17 APRIL**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Karnataka on 20 April and will address election rallies in IT capital Bengaluru and Chikkaballapur city.

Modi will first address the election rally at 4pm in Chikkaballapur and will visit Bengaluru to address a gathering at Palace Grounds at 6pm. Union Minister of State Shobha Karandlaje, who is contesting the election from Bengaluru North Lok Sabha Seat said: "I am confident that more than 2 lakh people will attend the programme," she said.

*–Agencies*

# Polls fight between 2 ideologies: Rahul

**MANDYA, 17 APRIL**

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday termed the upcoming Lok Sabha elections as a battle between two ideologies — INDIA bloc "fighting for the Constitution" on one hand and BJP, which wants to "abolish Constitution and democracy", on the other. If INDIA bloc is voted to power, it will be a "government of ordinary citizens, farmers, labourers and traders", Gandhi said while highlighting his party's manifesto in poll rallies in Karnataka.

While the BJP-government "belonged to 22 to 25 rich people", Congress will give a government which will work for the ordinary citizens, farmers, labourers and traders, he said at an election rally here.

This is his first visit to the Congress-governed Karnataka after the election schedule was announced a month ago.

He alleged that the BJP-led government at the Centre ran "Hafta Bazi" (extortion scheme) as he called the now-scrapped electoral bonds scheme as the biggest ever extortion scam in the world. Gandhi asked people to Google and watch Prime Minister Narendra Modi's interview on electoral bonds to see how his hands were shaking. "On the street it is known as extortion and 'Hafta Bazi'. Usually these works are done by petty goons. They bully and extort money. Electoral bonds are the biggest ever extortion scam of the world," Gandhi alleged.

Reiterating his party's commitment for taking up caste census, Gandhi said in Kolar that the first priority of the party if voted to power would be to take up nationwide caste census. Over 90% of the people in the country have not been adequately represented in fields including corporate and media.

Gandhi said 'Pehli Naukri Pakki' scheme will be launched in Karnataka and the party would work for the unemployed youth of the State. He further said for the first time in India, a legally guaranteed minimum support price will be given to farmers by Congress.

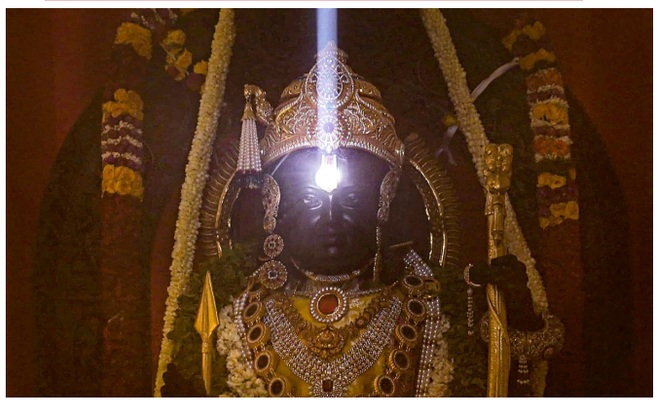
Targeting JD(S), Gandhi called it a "partner" of BJP which assists them 24 hours a day.

"I had told you during the Assembly election (2023) that there is a BJP here, which has got a 'B' team and you relied on it and today it is now known to everyone that it is not just a 'B' team but their partner. They help them 24 hours a day," Gandhi said.

*—Salar News/Agencies*

Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi during a public meeting ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, in Mandya, on Wednesday ***PHOTO: SALAR***

CELEBRATING RAM NAVAMI



Ritual of 'Surya Tilak' being performed on the idol of 'Ram Lalla' on Ram Navami, at Ayodhya Ram Temple on Wednesday. The 'Surya tilak' was made possible by an elaborate mechanism involving mirrors and lenses. It was on the forehead centre for three to three-and-a-half minutes ***PHOTO: PTI***

# Trains affected as farmers squat on track in Punjab

**CHANDIGARH/AMBALA, 17 APRIL**

Farmers under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha on Wednesday squatted on a rail track in Patiala district near Punjab and Haryana border, demanding the release of three farmers who had been arrested by Haryana Police.

The movement of more than 30 trains was impacted as they were either diverted, cancelled or short-terminated because of the blockade at Shambhu Railway Station, railway authorities said. The disruption in rail movement also caused inconvenience to rail passengers on the occasion of Ram Navami.

KMM leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said the Haryana administration had given them an assurance that the arrested farmers would be released by 16 April. Three farmers, including Navdeep Singh, were arrested during the ongoing farmers' stir. Though the Punjab Police had erected barricades to prevent protesters from heading towards the rail track, farmers forced their way and sat on the Ambala-Ludhiana rail track.

Farmer leaders said they will not end their protest until the protesters are released. "If the government releases them now, we will vacate the rail tracks within 10 minutes," said another farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal.

The farmer leaders said they were forced to sit on the rail track as the Haryana government failed to accept their demand.

*—PTI*

## 10 KILLED IN GUJ ROAD ACCIDENT

**NADIAD, 17 APRIL**

Ten people travelling in a car, including a child, died after their speeding vehicle crashed into a stationary truck on the Ahmedabad-Vadodara Expressway near Nadiad town of Gujarat's Kheda district on Wednesday, police officials said. Preliminary probe revealed the Maharashtra-registered truck was parked on the extreme left lane of the busy expressway after it developed a mechanical fault and the car rammed into it from the rear side, Superintendent of Police Rajesh Gadhiya said.

*—PTI*

SCRIBES SLAM MOVE

# *Pak blocks X over 'failure to adhere to law'*

**ISLAMABAD, 17 APRIL**

Pakistan Interior Ministry on Wednesday told Islamabad High Court (IHC) that the disruption of social media platform 'X' in the country is to address the concerns of its misuse, Dawn reported.

Interior Secretary Khurram Agha submitted a report on the IHC's orders on journalist Ehtisham Abbasi's petition challenging the ban.

This comes as Pakistan marked two months of the disruption in the services of X.

Dawn reported that access to X has been disrupted since 17 February, when former Rawalpindi commissioner Liaquat Chattha accused the chief election commissioner and chief justice of Pakistan of being involved in rigging the 8 February general elections.

The report submitted by the Interior Ministry said the "failure of Twitter/X to adhere to the lawful directives of the government of Pakistan and address concerns regarding the misuse of its platform necessitated the imposition of a ban".

"The decision to impose a ban on Twitter/X in Pakistan was made in the interest of upholding national security, maintaining public order, and preserving the integrity of our nation," it contended.

It noted that X was neither registered in Pakistan nor had

it signed any agreement to abide by local laws.

It claimed that X had "not complied with the requests of Pakistani authorities" after the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)'s Cyber Crime Wing (CCW) forwarded numerous requests via the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to take "significant action to block accounts involved in a defamatory campaign against the honourable chief justice of Pakistan".

Dawn reported that rights bodies and journalists' organisations have condemned the muzzling of social media, while internet service providers have also lamented losses due to disruptions. The United States had also called on Pakistan to lift restrictions on social media platforms.

*—PTI*

## Google workers protest firm's work with Israel, arrested

**NEW YORK, 17 APRIL**

A group of Google workers have been arrested after they held a sit-in protest to challenge the tech giant's work for the Israeli government.

Employees from the No Tech For Apartheid movement organised a 10-hour sit-in at Google's offices in New York and California on Tuesday.

During the protest, activists targeted the office of Thomas Kurian, the chief executive of Google Cloud, amid a row over a $1bn (£800m) contract with Israel.

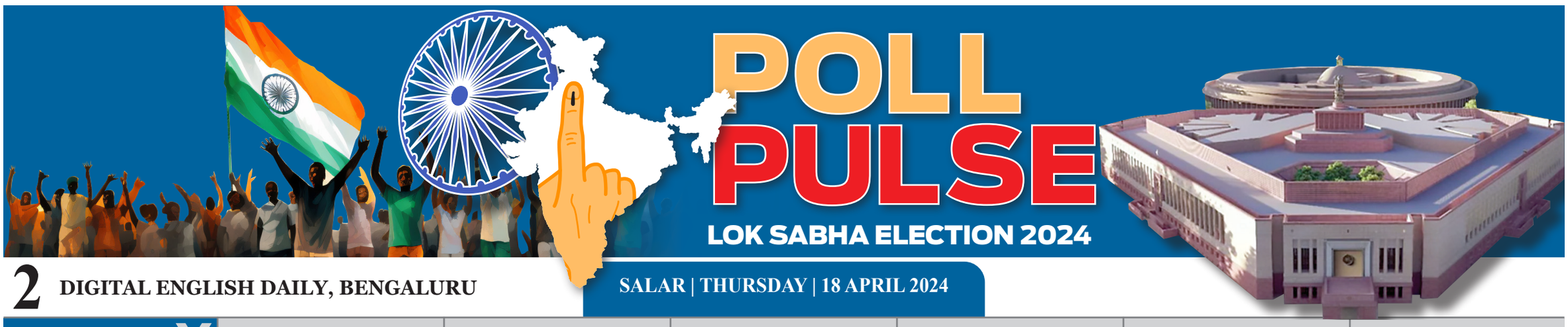
Videos posted on social media showed nine protesters subsequently being removed by police.

This led to a spokesman for the protest group, Jane Chung, criticising Google in a post on X: "Google orders arrest against its workers for protesting."

A live-stream video of the incident at Google's California office showed a security worker telling protesters that they had been placed on "admin leave", while also warning them about trespassing.

Later footage shows California police officers moving into the office, asking protesters if they are "refusing to leave" before they are marched out in handcuffs.

*—Courtesy, The Telegraph*






PHASE 1 | PHASE 2 | PHASE 3 | PHASE 4 | PHASE 5 | PHASE 6 | PHASE 7

# YOUR VOTE, YOUR FUTURE

As the world's largest democracy goes to polls, here is a look at the constituencies & candidates

## ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR

NO OF CANDIDATES: 12

**Phases: 1 | Phase 1: 1 seat**

**Constituencies:** Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Just 1 seat for the entire Union territory)

### KEY PLAYERS

**KULDEEP RAI SHARMA, CONGRESS**
**Seat:** Andaman and Nicobar Islands

The Andaman seat was bagged by Rai for first time in 2019. UNICEF awarded him with PGC Awards 2020 for his work to protect child rights. Rai was also awarded Sansad Ratna Award in 2022 and 2023

**BISHNU PADA RAY, BJP**
**Seat:** Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Ray, 73, first won the seat in 1999. He was re-elected from the same seat in 2009 and in 2014. He is a graduate from University of Calcutta in 1973

## JAMMU AND KASHMIR

NO OF CANDIDATES: 12

**Phases: 5 | Phase 1: 1 seat**

**Constituency:** Udhampur

### KEY PLAYERS

**JITENDRA SINGH, BJP**
**Seat:** Udhampur

Jitendra is the current BJP MP and Union Minister of State. He has won the seat twice by defeating Ghulam Nabi Azad and Vikramaditya Singh in 2014 and 2019 and is now eyeing a hat-trick

**CH LAL SINGH, CONGRESS**
**Seat:** Udhampur

Lal Singh aka Babar Sher previously won the seat in 2004 and 2009. Lal Singh had to step down as a minister in the last J&K government after his comments on Kathua gangrape. He is out on bail in a ED money laundering case

## MAHARASHTRA

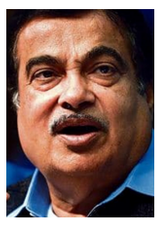
NO OF CANDIDATES: 97

**Phases: 5 | Phase 1: 5 seats**

**Constituencies:** Ramtek, Nagpur, Bhandara-Gondia, Gadchiroli-Chimur, and Chandrapur

### KEY PLAYERS

**NITIN GADKARI, BJP**
**Seat:** Nagpur



Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Gadkari has represented the Nagpur seat for the last two terms. He battled his first Lok Sabha election in 2014 against seven-time Congress MP Vilas Muttemwarand in 2019, he again defeated Congress candidate Nana Patole

**VIKAS THAKRE, CONGRESS**
**Seat:** Nagpur

Former Nagpur mayor, Thakre relies on his ties with the locals and Cong's longstanding presence in the region

## MANIPUR

NO OF CANDIDATES: 10

**Phases: 2 | Phase 1: 2 seats**

**Constituencies:** Inner Manipur, Outer Manipur

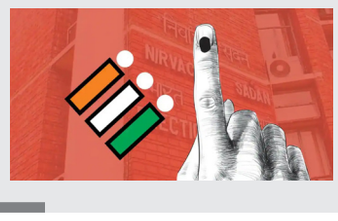
### KEY PLAYERS

**THOUNAOJAM SINGH. BJP**
**Seat:** Inner Manipur

Singh who is the state Education and Law Minister, comes from a family with deep ties in politics. His father was instrumental in setting up the BJP's foundational base in Manipur. He served in the Indian Police Service (IPS) till his retirement

**ANGOMCHA BIMOL AKOIJAM, Congress**
**Seat:** Inner Manipur

A Professor in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Angomcha Bimol Akoijam, had been voicing concerns about the ethnic tensions in Manipur long before violence broke out in May 2023.



LOK SABHA SEATS: 543

## UTTAR PRADESH

NO OF CANDIDATES: 70

**Phases: 7**
**Phase 1: 8 seats**

**Constituencies:** Saharanpur, Kairana, Bijnor, Muzaffarnagar, Nagina, Moradabad, Rampur, Pilibhit

### KEY PLAYERS

**JITIN PRASADA, BJP**
**Seat:** Pilibhit

Prasada, who was Rahul Gandhi's closest aide and Union minister in UPA govt, quit Cong and joined BJP in 2022. Incumbent BJP MP Varun Gandhi and his mother Maneka Gandhi represented the seat for 20 years but were denied a ticket this time

**Maulana Mohibullah Nadvi, SP**
**Seat:** Rampur

Rampur is Azam Khan's stronghold and SP's bastion, but after Khan's arrest, no one from his family wanted to contest the seat. SP filed Nadvi—an Imam—to woo the Muslim population in the constituency

## WEST BENGAL

NO OF CANDIDATES: 37

**Phases: 7**
**Phase 1: 3 seats**

**Constituencies:** Cooch Behar, Alipurduars, Jalpaiguri

### KEY PLAYERS

**NISITH PRAMANIK, BJP**
**Seat:** Cooch Behar

Pramanik is the Union minister for State and the incumbent MP of the seat. He joined BJP in 2019 after he was expelled from TMC in 2018

**Nirmal Chandra Roy, TMC**
**Seat:** Jalpaiguri

TMC newbie Roy is a first-time MLA and he has been nominated from Jalpaiguri. He will fight against incumbent BJP MP Jayanta Kumar

## UTTARAKHAND

NO OF CANDIDATES: 55

**Phases: 1**
**Phase 1: 5 Seats**

**Constituencies:** Tehri Garhwal, Garhwal, Almora (SC), Nainital–Udhamsingh Nagar, Haridwar

### KEY PLAYERS

**TRIVENDRA SINGH RAWAT, BJP**
**Seat:** Haridwar

Union minister and ex-CM Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank is the incumbent MP, yet this time, BJP has fielded Rawat, who was abruptly removed from CM's post in 2021. Though LS seat is now with BJP, the majority of Assembly segments are held by Opposition parties

**Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah, BJP**
**Seat:** Tehri Garhwal

Laxmi is a member of the erstwhile Tehri royal family and has represented the constituency in LS since a bypoll in 2012. The dynasty has dominated the constituency for decades: her father-in-law Manvendra Shah won eight Lok Sabha elections

## MEGHALAYA

NO OF CANDIDATES: 10

**Phases: 1 | Phase 1: 2 seats**

**Constituencies:** Shillong, Tura

### KEY PLAYERS

**MAZEL AMPAREEN LYNGDOH, NPP**
**Seat:** Shillong

Minister for health and family welfare, Ampareen left Congress and joined NPP this year. Prior to joining active politics, she was a lecturer.

**AGATHA SANGMA, NPP**
**Seat:** Tura

Her brother Conrad Sangma is the Chief Minister of Meghalaya. At the age of 29, she is the youngest member of parliament ever in India till date. Sangma is the second woman from Northeast India to be appointed a union minister

## NAGALAND

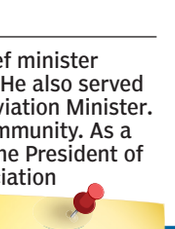
NO OF CANDIDATES: 3

**Phases: 1 seat | Phase 1: 1 seat**

**Constituency:** Nagaland

### KEY PLAYERS

**S SUPONGMEREN JAMIR, INC**
**Seat:** Nagaland



President of Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee (NPCC), Jamir who is a staunch advocate for students' right had undertook a patriotic fast unto death in 1990, highlighting issues of superannuation of age within the Naga Students Federation

**CHUMBEN MURRY, NDPP**
**Seat:** Nagaland

Murry had been actively involved in various social activities where he served as the Honourary Secretary of the Indian Red Cross Society. His career in government services began as a Medical officer for the Government of Nagaland from 1987-1990

## ARUNACHAL PRADESH

NO OF CANDIDATES: 14

**Phases: 1 | Phase 1: 2 seats**

**Constituencies:** Arunachal Pradesh East, Arunachal Pradesh West

### KEY PLAYERS

**TAPIR GAO, BJP**
**Seat:** Arunachal East

Gao was first elected to 14th Lok Sabha after losing elections in 2009 and 2014 against Congress. He is currently also the member of the Committee on Welfare of SC and ST's.

**NABAM TUKI, INC**
**Seat:** Arunachal West

Tuki was the former chief minister between 2011 and 2016. He also served as Transport and Civil Aviation Minister. He belongs to Nyishi community. As a sports lover, he is also the President of Arunachal Cricket Association

## BIHAR

NO OF CANDIDATES: 38

**Phases: 7 | Phase 1: 4 seats**

**Constituencies:** Aurangabad, Gaya, Nawada and Jamui

### KEY PLAYERS

**SUSHIL KUMAR SINGH, BJP**
**Seat:** Aurangabad

Singh who is an incumbent Member of Parliament quit Janata Dal in 2014 to join BJP and managed to retain his seat in both 2014 and 2019 LS elections. In the 17th Lok Sabha, he is a member of the Ministry of Road, Transport, and Highways' Consultative Committee, Committee on Public Undertakings, Committee on Petitions, and Standing Committee on Coal and Steel

**JITAN RAM MANJHI, HAM (Secular)**
**Seat:** Gaya

He was the 23rd Chief Minister from 2014-2015 and founding president of HAM party. When Congress's fortunes declined with the rise of Lalu Prasad, he joined Janata Dal and later RJD. In 2015, Manjhi became a minister in the Nitish Kumar government

TOTAL SEATS GOING TO POLLS IN PHASE 1: 102

## ASSAM

NO OF CANDIDATES: 35

**Phases: 3 | Phase 1: 5 seats**

**Constituencies:** Kaziranga, Sonitpur, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur

### KEY PLAYERS

**GAURAV GOGOI, CONGRESS**
**Seat:** Jorhat

He is the Deputy Leader of Congress. He describes himself as a Centre-Left politician who supports inclusive development, equality, and social justice. He is renowned for his outspoken criticism of the current administration

**RISHIRAJ KAUNDINYA, AAP**
**Seat:** Sonitpur

He is the key leader of AAP Assam. He is also a businessman by profession. He is a BA graduate and has many cases registered related to cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property

## RAJASTHAN

NO OF CANDIDATES: 114

**Phases: 2 | Phase 1: 12**

**Constituencies:** Ganganagar, Bikaner, Churu, Jhunjhunu, Sikar, Jaipur, Jaipur Rural, Alwar, Bharatpur, Karauli–Dholpur, Dausa, Nagaur

### KEY PLAYERS

**PRIYANKA BALAN MEGHWAL, BJP**
**Seat:** Ganganagar

Priyanka is BJP's first woman candidate from this constituency. The incumbent MP Nihalchand Meghwal was replaced with Priyanka. Ganganagar's electorate has leaned towards BJP

**GOVIND RAM MEGHWAL, CONGRESS**
**Seat:** Bikaner

The seat will see a rerun of the battle between Govind Ram Meghwal and incumbent MP Arjun Ram Meghwal after 15 years. He was the former cabinet minister for disaster management & relief. The constituency has remained as a BJP bastion since the year 2004 when the seat was won by actor Dharmendra

## TAMIL NADU

NO OF CANDIDATES: 97

**Phases: 1 | Phase 1: 39 seats**

**Constituencies:** Tiruvallur, Chennai North, Chennai South, Chennai Central, Sriperumbudur, Kancheepuram, Arakkonam, Vellore, Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri, Tiruvannamalai, Arani, Viluppuram, Kallakurichi, Salem, Namakkal, Erode, Tiruppur, Nilgiris, Coimbatore, Pollachi, Dindigul, Karur, Tiruchirappalli, Perambalur, Cuddalore, Chidambaram, Mayiladuthurai, Nagapattinam, Thanjavur, Sivaganga, Madurai, Theni, Virudhunagar, Ramanathapuram, Thoothukkudi, Tenkasi, Tirunelveli, Kanniyakumari

### KEY PLAYERS

**THAMIZHACHI THANGAPANDIAN, DMK**
**Seat:** Chennai South

Thamizhachi is banking on DMK's schemes, which are said to be beneficial for elderly women, housewives and young women. She is contesting Lok Sabha elections for the second time. She is poet, writer and educationist

**K ANNAMALAI, BJP**
**Seat:** Coimbatore

Ex-IPS officer Annamalai is also the BJP TN President. Coimbatore has been an AIADMK stronghold. However, BJP has also established a notable presence here, with Coimbatore being one of the earliest seats in Tamil Nadu to elect a BJP MP

## SIKKIM

NO OF CANDIDATES: 14

**Phases: 1 | Phase 1: 1 seat**

**Constituencies:** Sikkim

### KEY PLAYERS

**GOPAL CHETTRI, CONGRESS**
**Seat:** Sikkim

Chettri was appointed as President of Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee in September last year. However, the seat is a SKM bastion but also won by BJP occassionally

**INDRA HANG SUBBA, SKM**
**Seat:** Sikkim

Subba is the sitting member of Parliament. Currently, he is a research scholar at Sikkim University pursuing his doctorate in Physics. He has completed his Master of Science

ELIGIBLE VOTERS: 96.8cr

## WORLD'S LARGEST DEMOCRACY VOTES

| | |
|---|---|
| Rs 1.2 trillion<br>Approx cost of polls | 1.5 crore<br>Election officials |
| 10.5 lakh<br>Polling stations | 4 June<br>Results expected |

# 8 Union ministers, 2 ex-CMs are in fray

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

Eight Union Ministers, two former chief ministers and one ex-governor are among those who are set to test their electoral fate in the first phase of elections on 19 April when 102 seats across 21 states and Union territories will go to polls.

Union Road and Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari is seeking a hat-trick of win from the Nagpur seat. In 2014, he had defeated seven-time MP Vilas Muttemwar by a margin of 2.84 lakh votes and retained the seat in 2019 by defeating current Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole by 2.16 lakh votes.

Union Minister Kiren Rijiju is contesting from the Arunachal West seat. The 52-year-old has represented the constituency thrice since 2004. Rijiju's main rival is former chief minister and present president of Arunachal Pradesh Congress Nabam Tuki.

Sarbananda Sonowal, Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, is seeking a return to Lok Sabha from Dibrugarh in Assam. Muzaffarnagar, known for its intricate caste dynamics, is witnessing a three-cornered electoral battle, with Union minister Sanjeev Baliyan locked in competition against Samajwadi Party's Harindra Malik and BSP candidate Dara Singh Prajapati.

Jitendra Singh, a two-time parliamentarian and a junior minister in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet, is aiming for a hat-trick in Udhampur.

Bhupendra Yadav, Union minister and Rajya Sabha member who replaced sitting MP Balak Nath, is in a contest with sitting Congress MLA Lalit Yadav, who belongs to Matsya region of Alwar district in Rajasthan and enjoys the support of the Yadav community.

Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal is pitted against former Congress minister Govind Ram Meghwl from Bikaner parliamentary seat in Rajasthan.

The Nilgiris Lok Sabha constituency in Tamil Nadu is witnessing one of the keenly watched battles between A Raja, the incumbent DMK MP, and former telecom minister, and L Murugan of the BJP, who is the Union Minister of State for Fisheries. This will be the first time that Murugan, who was elected to Rajya Sabha from Madhya Pradesh, is contesting from here.

Sivaganga MP Karti Chidambaram is aiming for a re-election from a seat his father won seven times, competing against BJP's T Devanathan Yadav and AIADMK's Xavier Dass.

Tamil Nadu BJP president K Annamalai is set to take the ballot test in Tamil Nadu's Coimbatore where he is pitted against DMK leader Ganapathy P Rajkumar and AIADMK's Singai Ramachandran.

Tamilisai Soundararajan, who recently resigned as governor of Telangana and Lt Governor of Puducherry to return to active politics, is contesting from Chennai South Lok Sabha constituency. Daughter of veteran Congress leader Kumari Ananthan, Soundararajan had contested 2019 Lok Sabha elections against DMK's Kanimozhi, but lost by a huge margin in Thoothukudi.

This time, Kanimozhi is seeking a re-election from the seat. NDA ally Tamil Maanila Congress (Moopanar) has fielded SDR Vijayaseelan and AIADMK has fielded R Sivasami Velumani from the constituency.

Nakul Nath, son of Congress leader and former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath, is seeking a re-election Chhindwara.

The seat has remained firmly with Kamal Nath, who has won the seat nine times since 1980. In the 2019 polls, the BJP bagged 28 seats out of the state's 29, but missed out on picking Chhindwara, where Nakul beat the BJP's candidate by 37,536 votes to emerge as the lone Congress MP in the state.

Of the two Lok Sabha constituencies in Tripura, the seat of West Tripura that votes in the first phase on April 19 will see a high-voltage clash between former chief minister Biplab Kumar Deb and state Congress president Ashish Kumar Saha.

Having won Lok Sabha elections twice since 2014 from Kaliabor constituency in Assam, Gaurav Gogoi, Congress' deputy leader in Lok Sabha and son of former chief minister Tarun Gogoi, finds himself as the new candidate in neighbouring Jorhat, where BJP's Topon Kumar Gogoi won in 2019.

Gaurav Gogoi's shift to Jorhat came after the impact of delimitation exercise in his 2019 constituency, Kaliabor.

Manipur Law and Education Minister Basanta Kumar Singh is BJP's nominee for the Inner Manipur constituency and is pitted against JNU professor and Congress candidate Bimal Akoijam.

Singh, who belongs to the Meiti community, is the son of Thounaojam Chaoba Singh who served as the Union Minister of State for sports, youth affairs, culture and food processing in the NDA government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

*—PTI*

Jitendra Singh, Kiren Rijiju, Nitin Gadkari, Bhupender Yadav, Arjun Ram Meghwal and Sarbananda Sonowal are testing their electoral fate this time

## PUDUCHERRY

NO OF CANDIDATES: 26

**Phases: 1 | Phase 1: 1 seat | Constituencies: Puducherry**

### KEY PLAYERS

**G THAMIZHVENDAN, AIADMK**
**Seat:** Puducherry

Thamizhvendan is secretary to youth wing of AIADMK. This is his first electoral poll contest

**VE VAITHILINGAM, CONGRESS**
**Seat:** Puducherry

The sitting MP Vaithilingam has been the chief minister of Puducherry twice. He was also the second youngest minister of Puducherry

## TRIPURA

NO OF CANDIDATES: 9

**Phases: 2 | Phase 1: 1 seat**

**Constituencies:** Tripura West

### KEY PLAYERS

**ASHISH KUMAR SAHA, CONGRESS**
**Seat:** Tripura West

Saha won 2013 Assembly polls on Cong ticket from Bardowali. He later shifted to TMC in 2016. After a year, he switched to BJP and won 2018 Assembly polls from Bardowali. In 2023 Assembly polls, he contested against CM Manik Saha but lost

**BIPLAB KUMAR DEB, BJP**
**Seat:** Tripura West

BJP nominated Deb for Tripura West, snubbing Union minister Pratima Bhoumik. He was the former chief minister of Tripura. He defeated the then ruling CPI(M)-led Left Front government in the 2018 Assembly elections

## LAKSHADWEEP

NO OF CANDIDATES: 4

**Phases: 1 | Phase 1: 1 Seat**

**Constituencies:** Lakshadweep

### KEY PLAYERS

**MUHAMMED HAMDULLA SAYEED, CONGRESS**
**Seat:** Lakshadweep

Muhammed Hamdullah Sayeed was elected to the 15th Lok Sabha at the age of 26, He was the youngest MP in the 15th Lok Sabha

**MOHAMMED FAIZAL PADIPPURA, NCP**
**Seat:** Lakshadweep

Faizal is the current MP. He was given 10-year jail term in attempt to murder case. He was disqualified from LS and in 2023 his membership was restored

## CHHATTISGARH

NO OF CANDIDATES: 11

**Phase 1: 3 | Phase: 1: 1 Seat**

**Constituencies:** Bastar

### KEY PLAYERS

**KAWASI LAKHMA, CONGRESS**
**Seat:** Bastar

The 70-year-old is a tribal leader and 6 time legislator from Konta, a Maoist hit district. He was one of the survivors of the 2003 naxal attack in Darbha

**MAHESH KASHYAP, BJP**
**Seat:** Bastar

He is the President of BJP ST Morcha. He was a VHP and Bajrang Dal member. He is vocal against religious conversions and has conducted multiple rallies against it. He was also a sarpanch

## MADHYA PRADESH

NO OF CANDIDATES: 77

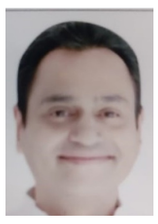
**Phases: 4 | Phase 1 : 6 Seats**

**Constituencies:** Chhindwara, Balaghat, Jabalpur, Mandla, Sidhi, Shahdol

### KEY PLAYERS

**BUNTY VIVEK SAHU, BJP**
**Seat:** Chhindwara

Sahu has consistently contended against Congress in this Assembly segment. In 2023 Assembly polls, he gave a tough fight to Kamal Nath, who won by 34,000 votes. He is expected to give a tough fight to Nakul



**NAKUL KAMAL NATH, CONGRESS**
**Seat:** Chhindwara

Nakul Nath is son of Congress stalwart Kamal Nath, and sitting MP from the seat. It is the only LS seat in MP, which BJP lost in 2019. Many of Nath's close aides have jumped shipped to BJP

## MIZORAM

NO OF CANDIDATES: 6

**Phases: 1 | Phase 1: 1 seat**

**Constituencies:** Mizoram

### KEY PLAYERS

**PU LALBIAKZAMA, CONGRESS**
**Seat:** Mizoram

Lalbiakzama is a former cop and a former state Home Secretary. He is urging voters to elect Congress as the ruling party is sideling minorities. He says there is need to stabilise the economy and address unemployment

**RICHARD VANLALHMANGAIHA, ZPM**
**Seat:** Mizoram

Vanlalhmangaiha is one of the top contenders in seat. ZPM, which was registered as a political party in 2019, won the 2023 Assembly elections. It is the first time a candidate from ZPM is running for Lok Sabha polls

## YouTuber held for trespassing into KIAL runway

**BENGALURU, 17 APRIL**

Airport police have arrested a YouTuber for trespassing and filming a video on the runway of Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) in Devanahalli. Vikas Gowda had recorded and uploaded a video on his YouTube channel where he claimed to have spent 24 hours near the runway of KIA without any official permission, police said. In the video, he is heard saying, "I managed to enter without a ticket and stayed near the runway for a full day. I was able to move around undetected by all the airport officials and staff, capturing footage along the way."After the video surfaced online, Central Industrial Security Force officials alerted KIA police for necessary action. Subsequently, police arrested and released him on bail. *—Salar News*

## Rock from prehistoric mound removed in Ballari

**BALLARI, 17 APRIL**

Ballari rural police have registered a case after miscreants removed a rock adjacent to ancient Stone Age drawings at Rachamma hillock in Sanganakal near Ballari. Sanganakal Prehistoric Mound, renowned for its Stone Age drawings and sketches, is under the jurisdiction of State government's Archaeology Museums and Heritage Department. Deputy Director of Tourism Department Prabhulinga Talakeri and Deputy Director of Archaeological Museums and Heritage Department R Shejeshwar assessed the extent of the damage. Ballari rural police invoked Section 26 sub-section (1) of Karnataka Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Ruins Act, 1961. *—Salar News*

## BJP invites youth voters to share stories about PM

**BENGALURU, 17 APRIL**

Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya has launched a campaign titled 'Jams with Namo', aimed at connecting with the youth and first-time voters. The campaign encourages participants to share their stories, songs, and anecdotes about their experiences and vibes with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Surya is spearheading this initiative in a bid to foster a deeper connection between the people of Bengaluru South and the leadership of Modi. Through 'Jams with Namo', voters are invited to register and share their experiences. This is aimed at creating awareness about Modi's governance over 10 years. The event is scheduled to take place on 21 April. The deadline to register is 19 April. *—Salar News*

## AI model for climate-smart farming launched

**BENGALURU, 17 APRIL**

Imagine a tool that not only predicts the onset of weather anomalies – like the current heatwave – but also alerts farmers about what can be done with specific reference to the crops that they have chosen to cultivate. Thanks to rapid progress in Artificial Intelligence (AI) this may soon be possible. A stepping stone in that direction is Aksara, an open-source microlanguage model launched by Bengaluru-based agri-tech firm, Cropin Technology. Aksara promises to provide farmers with the right kind information, hyper-tuned to local conditions and crops, so that they can make climate-smart decisions. The existing large language model, which served as the base model for Aksara, is fed with more generic data, which are biased towards the Global North, said Krishna Kumar, founder and CEO of Cropin. "What we have done with Aksara is that we fine-tuned contextual data on nine kinds of crops with particular reference to countries in the Indian subcontinent," added Kumar. *—PTI*

# Tejasvi faces stiff challenge from Sowmya in B'luru South

### The seat has been a BJP bastion since 1991

**BENGALURU, 17 APRIL**

BJP youth wing chief and current MP Tejasvi Surya, who is seeking re-election from the prestigious Bengaluru South Lok Sabha seat, is facing a spirited challenge from Sowmya Reddy of Congress.

The 41-year-old Sowmya, daughter of Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy, is a former MLA from Jayanagar here and lost the Assembly elections last year by a mere 16 votes.

Spread across eight Assembly constituencies, Bengaluru South has been a BJP bastion since 1991. In the 2023 Assembly elections, the BJP won five of them and Congress three. Since 1977, Congress has won here only once when former chief minister late R Gundu Rao emerged victorious in the 1989 elections.

A constituency with a significant Brahmin population, it had been represented mostly by members of the community. Hoping to turn the tide against the BJP, the ruling Congress in Karnataka has put all its might behind Sowmya with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his deputy DK Shivakumar leaving no stone unturned to boost her electoral prospects. Congress is banking heavily on its five guarantees and Sowmya being the Transport Minister's daughter highlights how the 'Shakti' guarantee has allowed women to travel in non-luxury government buses across the State free of cost.

Tejasvi Surya, Sowmya Reddy **PHOTO: PTI**

"Do you travel in buses? Which places have you visited in the recent past? Do you pay or travel for free?" Sowmya asked women voters during a roadshow. During canvassing, Sowmya also makes it a point to tell people about the four other guarantees 'Gruha Lakshmi', 'Gruha Jyoti', 'Yuva Nidhi' and 'Anna Bhagya'. "Who brought 'Achchhe Din'? Is it Congress or the BJP? Which 'Achchhe Din' you will vote for?"

Like many other BJP candidates, Surya underlines the strides made by the country under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the past 10 years, during his meetings with voters. "Ten years ago, when you look at the state of our economy, the white paper mentions in detail the State of the country's economy. We were counted among the most fragile economies in the world. Today, we are one of the top five economies. This journey from fragile five to top five captures how our institutions were strengthened," Surya said. The 33-year-old Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha president had been conducting talks with right-wing intellectuals, especially those affiliated with RSS and 'Sangh Parivar' in his constituency.

*—PTI*

### Sowmya threatens to sue Tejasvi over event disruption claims

**BENGALURU, 17 APRIL**

Bengaluru South parliamentary seat candidate Sowmya Reddy has threatened to take legal action against her BJP opponent Tejasvi Surya for allegedly raising false accusations over the disruption of an event attended by the latter here.Surya accused Congress of orchestrating disruptions, alleging that agitators were sent to physically assault women and senior citizens at his meetings. "Fearing their inevitable defeat, desperate Congress first resorted to bribery & got caught with cash in Jayanagar 4th Block," he said on X platform. Denying the allegations, Reddy said on X: "Please expect a legal notice & defamation case for all the lies you are spreading about me. No wonder the amazing citizens of Bangalore South have lost their faith in you." *—Salar News*

**PULSE OF THE STATE**

# LS polls: Pre-poll survey predicts Congress majority

**BENGALURU, 17 APRIL**

With only 10 days remaining for the first phase of Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka, State's voter preference seems to lean towards Congress, according to a pre-poll survey conducted by eedina.com.

Congress is likely to get 13-18 seats of the total of 28 seats while BJP-JD(S) alliance is anticipated to secure 10 to 13 seats, as per the survey, facilitated by Kannada news portal eedina.com.

During the survey, eedina.com invited citizens to volunteer and provided them with training to ask the right questions. Rather than relying on phone calls, volunteers engaged with voters directly in their homes to analyse the voters' opinions.

The survey revealed that around 51.41 per cent of respondents are aware of the Gruha Lakshmi scheme, indicating a potential increase in Congress vote share, especially with the declaration of 'Nyaya Patra' of Rs 1 lakh for the guarantees. 48.59 per cent of the respondents were unaware of the Mahalakshmi scheme, a poll promise by Congress. 52.28 per cent of the respondents are inclined to vote for Congress due to their guarantee schemes, the survey said.Around 41.87 per cent of respondents were dissatisfied with the Central government's treatment of Karnataka in terms of funds allocation.

When questioned about the major challenges faced in the past decade: 85.30 per cent of respondents expressed discontent over the rising prices; 37 per cent felt that employment opportunities diminished due to BJP, while 19 per cent attributed it to the Congress and 36 per cent of respondents believed that corruption increased in the last decade, primarily due to BJP.

Regarding Prime Minister Modi's performance, 47 per cent of respondents felt that India's global standing has improved. Around 33% rated Modi's work as "excellent," and 35.8 per cent considered it "satisfactory". 45 per cent of respondents believe Modi should be given a third term as Prime Minister. In contrast, a majority of respondents, 56 per cent, expressed their inclination towards voting in favour of the Congress' guarantee schemes. This sentiment is even stronger among women, with 59 per cent indicating support for the Congress' guarantees.

Furthermore, 39.6 per cent of respondents believed that State government guarantees are more beneficial, compared to 20 per cent who favour Union government schemes. *—Salar News*

**ON CAMPAIGN TRAIL**

Congress Central Bengaluru candidate Mansoor Ali Khan campaigns at Shivajinagar with MLA Rizwan Arshad and party workers on Wednesday **PHOTO: SALAR**

## WOMAN, DAUGHTER FOUND DEAD IN ASHRAM

**CHITRADURGA, 17 APRIL**

A woman and her daughter were found dead in the water tank of an ashram in Chitradurga on Tuesday night.

While initial investigations hint at a possible suicide, the presence of a death note and other factors have raised suspicions of foul play.

Geetha, 42, and her daughter Priyanka, 20, had been serving as priests at the ashram for several years. The contents of the note have not been disclosed.

The brother of Geetha has filed a formal complaint with police, urging them to conduct a thorough investigation to uncover the truth behind the deaths. Superintendent of Police Dharmender Kumar Meena said, "We are investigating the case from all angles. All seized items from the ashram have been sent to the forensic laboratory for analysis. The truth will be revealed once we receive the forensic report." *—Salar News*

## BJP ACCUSES DKS OF 'BRAZEN ABUSE OF POWER'

**BENGALURU, 17 APRIL**

BJP leader Amit Malviya on Wednesday accused Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar of "brazen abuse of power" after a video of him seeking votes from the residents of a housing society in Bengaluru Rural Lok Sabha segment was shared widely on social media platforms.

In the video clip, Shivakumar was purportedly heard saying that he had come for a "business deal" and if the 2,510 houses in the housing society -- 6,424 votes -- go to his candidate -- his brother DK Suresh is seeking re-election from Bangalore Rural in the coming elections -- then he assured them that their major issues concerning supply of Cauvery river water and need for a civic amenity site would be resolved by him within three months.

BJP IT department head, attacked Shivakumar, the State Congress Chief, and said irrespective of who the people choose to vote for, it is his responsibility as a minister to provide amenities to the people.Tagging the Election Commission of India on 'X', he urged them to take note of the multiple model code of conduct violations and intimidation in this case.

Shivakumar said it was his duty to solve the problems of the apartment, or any citizen for that matter. *—Salar News*

# Flights from City to Dubai, Sharjah disrupted due to adverse weather

**BENGALURU, 17 APRIL**

In the wake of adverse weather conditions, flight operations between Mangaluru and Bengaluru airports to Dubai and Sharjah have faced disruptions, causing inconvenience to travellers. The inclement weather, characterized by heavy rain and thunderstorms, has prompted authorities to take precautionary measures, resulting in the cancellation and delay of several flights.

Two flights, one operated by Emirates and the other by Indigo from Bengaluru airport, were cancelled on Wednesday. Additionally, an inbound flight from Dubai to KIA faced a 20-minute delay. Another AirArabia flight destined for Sharjah was cancelled on Wednesday.

Passengers scheduled to fly from Mangaluru International Airport and Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru to Dubai International Airport and Sharjah International Airport have been advised to stay updated with their respective airlines for revised travel arrangements. Several flights operated by major airlines such as Emirates, IndiGo and Spice Jet have been either cancelled or rescheduled.

Flights are delayed, diverted, and impacted by displaced crew members, with recovery expected to take time. "I was supposed to return to work in Dubai after a brief fortnight vacation at home here in Bengaluru and now I will have to wait for updates from the airlines and it could be a couple of days more before the regular flights resume. I was told the Dubai Airport is flooded and the runway has been out of bounds," said Sylvester Marcus, a business development manager based in Dubai. *—Salar News*

**WORK IN PROGRESS**

Bangalore Development Authority started the construction work at the flyover up-ramp at Hebbal in Bengaluru on Wednesday. The first day of the diversion witnessed traffic bottlenecks in the area. Only two wheelers will be allowed in the flyover up-ramp **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

# Ex-Cong MLA Akhanda Murthy joins BJP

**BENGALURU, 17 APRIL**

Former Congress MLA Akhanda Srinivas Murthy joined BJP here on Wednesday in the presence of former chief minister BS Yediyurappa. He was at loggerheads with Congress leadership after miscreants attacked his house following the episode of his nephew posting allegedly derogatory content on social media in 2022 against Prophet Mohammed.

The Dalit leader joining BJP has come in a shot in the arm as the former Congress MLA from Pulakeshinagar (Frazer Town) has a sizable vote base. Pulikeshinagar Assembly comes under Bengaluru North Lok Sabha constituency from where Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje is contesting.

Former chief minister BS Yediyurappa welcomed Murthy by handing over BJP's flag to him at his residence here in the City. "The joining of Akhanda at this stage of the election has given great strength to the party. Shobha Karandlaje will win from Bengaluru North Lok Sabha seat by 2.5 lakh to 3 lakh votes," he said.

"When DJ Halli-KG Halli Hindu-Muslim violence took place in Bengaluru, the house of Murthy was burnt. At that time his party Congress did not support him. We stood firmly with him," Yediyurappa said.

Akhanda Srinivas Murthy **PHOTO: PTI**

He represented Pulakeshinagar Assembly seat for JD(S) between 2013 and 2018 and for Congress from 2018 to 2023. He had secured the highest margin of votes in the State in 2018 elections.

Following an objectionable post on Prophet Muhammad, his constituency witnessed large-scale violence in 2020. The violent mob attacked and torched his house as the post was made by his nephew. The mob also torched KG Halli police station and burnt police vehicles. Three people were killed in the police firing.

Murthy had contested the 2023 Assembly election on a BSP ticket, following the denial of a ticket by Congress.

Murthy accused fellow Congress leader R Sampath Raj of allegedly orchestrating an attack on his residence and violence. Later, Raj, a former mayor along with his accomplices, was arrested in the case. "Those who lit the fire at my house are roaming with Congress State President DK Shivakumar. It's good that the way they treated me made me join BJP today. It's good to support Prime Minister Narendra Modi and bring back the BJP government in Karnataka again," Murthy said. *—Salar News*

### BJP MP Karadi Sanganna joins Congress

**BENGALURU, 17 APRIL**

Former BJP MP Karadi Sanganna on Wednesday joined Congress. The two-time MP from Koppal has been upset with BJP leadership for not giving him a ticket to contest the coming Lok Sabha elections. Sanganna was welcomed into the party fold by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who is also the State Congress chief. *—PTI*

**DG HALLI UNDER LENS**

# Glanders disease detected in horse

**BENGALURU, 17 APRIL**

State Department of Animal Husbandry has designated DJ Halli here as a 'disease-prone zone' and issued a notice to residents after a case of Glanders disease in a horse was reported from the area on Wednesday.

A horse caretaker from DJ Halli was tested positive for the virus.

To prevent further transmission, strict restrictions have been imposed on the movement of horses, donkeys and mules, all potential carriers of the infection. Glanders disease, caused by the bacterium Burkholderia mallei, is highly contagious and poses a significant threat to animal and human health.

This ailment induces the formation of nodules and ulcers in the respiratory tract, known as "Farcy", which can be fatal if untreated. Glanders is zoonotic, meaning it can transfer to humans, particularly those in close contact with infected animals. Medical experts stress the importance of regular check-ups to monitor and control the spread of Glanders.

Glanders disease, caused by the bacterium Burkholderia mallei, is highly contagious and poses a significant threat to animal and human health **PHOTO: PTI**

**Symptoms of Glanders disease**

Fever, shivers, chest pain, sore throat, headache, cough, muscle soreness and tightness, sensitivity to light, excessive mucous, tearing in the eyes and fatigue.

**People who are more likely to be exposed**

Veterinarians or veterinary students, hoof-care workers, animal transportation workers, slaughterhouse workers, farmers and horse handlers.

**Precautions**

Protective equipment like disposable gloves, eyewear, masks, and gowns can reduce the risk of transmission. It is better to take precaution for the disease. *—Salar News*

## Maratha activists block Cong MLA's convoy

**LATUR, 17 APRIL**

Some members of the Maratha community blocked the path of former Maharashtra minister and Congress MLA Amit Deshmukh's convoy at a village in Latur district when he was on his way for election campaign. The incident took place on Monday evening at Vasangaon village in Latur tehsil, which forced Deshmukh to return without interacting with the local people. Deshmukh was on his way to campaign for Congress candidate Dr Shivaji Kalge. When MLA Deshmukh's convoy arrived at the village, Maratha quota agitators started shouting slogans demanding reservation for the community, one of the protesters said. A video of Maratha agitators protesting in front of Deshmukh's vehicle went viral in social media. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

## Ex-M'rashtra min Eknath Khadse receives threat call

**MUMBAI, 17 APRIL**

Former Maharashtra minister Eknath Khadse has received a call from an unidentified person threatening him with dire consequences following which police have started a probe into it, an official said on Wednesday. Khadse, who is currently with NCP (SP), earlier this month said he would return to BJP soon. He received the threat call on Monday from an unidentified number, following which he approached the Muktai Nagar police in Jalgaon district, the official said. As per the complaint, the caller mentioned the names of gangsters Dawood Ibrahim and Chhota Shakeel while threatening Khadse, he said. The caller has not yet been traced, the official said. Based on Khadse's complaint, a non-cognisable offence has been registered under relevant provisions against the unidentified person, he said. A probe is on into the case, he added. He had earlier also received threat calls. *—PTI*

## LS polls: AAP launches 'AAP Ka RamRajya' website

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

AAP on Wednesday launched its "AAP Ka RamRajya" website to showcase the party's concept of "Ram Rajya", saying Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tried to realise the ideals of Lord Ram in the national capital. The website launch came ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the first phase of which will be held on Friday, and coincided with the Ram Navami festival. During a joint press conference, Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said the website will showcase AAP's concept of "Ram Rajya" as well as the work done by the party's governments. This is the first time that Kejriwal is not among his people on Ram Navami, Singh said and alleged that the Kejriwal was sent to jail in a "baseless" case on the basis of statements from "false" witnesses. *—PTI*

## Rajput community to boycott BJP candidates in UP

**MUZAFFARNAGAR, 17 APRIL**

Rajputs here held a 'mahapanchayat' and decided to boycott BJP candidates in Muzaffarnagar, Kairana and Saharanpur Lok Sabha constituencies for allegedly neglecting the community while distributing party tickets, a leader said on Wednesday. The 'mahapanchayat' was called on 16 April in the Kheda area by Thakur Pooran Singh, the national president of Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan and a prominent Rajput leader in the area. It was attended by the Chaubisa Rajput Community spread across Muzaffarnagar constituency and other Rajput communities. *—PTI*

# Farmers don't trust BJP manifesto, says Tikait

### He says BJP is working at the behest of capitalists

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

Farmers do not trust BJP's 2024 Lok Sabha poll manifesto, farmer leader Rakesh Tikait said as he alleged that the party's government at the Centre is working at the behest of capitalists.

India is being seen as a source of cheap labour and the control of corporates over the government has grown, he said, while asking farmer organisations to be strong to deal with issues and achieve their goals. "We do not trust the manifesto. In 2014 as well, the manifesto said they would implement the Swaminathan Committee's recommendations. It has been 10 years now and the recommendations have not been implemented," he said. They are trying to fool the people, Tikait claimed and added that "they are using the A2+FL formula and stating that 'we have implemented the recommendations'".

Farmer leader Rakesh Tikait PHOTO: PTI

- Tikait stressed that neither he nor his outfit supported BJP in 2014 though they may have backed some individual candidates. He also expressed apprehension that India is being looked at as a source of cheap labour

The A2+FL formula for minimum support price (MSP) for crops means it includes costs incurred by the farmer and the value of the family labour. The commission had recommended the C2+50 per cent formula that takes into account comprehensive cost of production. The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), an umbrella body of various farmer unions that spearheaded the 2020-21 farmer protest, has said the BJP's manifesto has no mention of the MSP at the formula suggested by the Swaminathan Commission and called it an "open challenge" against farmers and farm workers.

Tikait stressed that neither he nor his outfit supported BJP in 2014 though they may have backed some individual candidates. BJP is trying to fool the people and "working at the behest of capitalists", he said.

"This gang of businessmen have captured the political party. If it was a government, it would have worked for farmers and other people of the country. This is not the BJP government. That is why they call it the government of a particular person," Tikait said. Citing the 2020-21 farmers' protest, of which he was a part of, Tikait said there will be a movement on land rights as well.

He also expressed apprehension that India is being looked at as a source of cheap labour.

"In competition to China, they (corporates) need a country where the population is large, they can build industries, and cheap labour is available. This country will become a labour country, where they will get a market, as well as cheap labour," he said. Farmer organisations have to be strong, he said and added that today every political party is talking about farmers, the poor and the youth. *—PTI*

**KERALA LOK SABHA POLLS**

# No Congress flags in Wayanad out of fear for BJP: CPI(M)

**T'PURAM, 17 APRIL**

The ruling CPI(M) in Kerala alleged on Wednesday that Congress had abandoned its own flag and that of its key partner, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), during the Lok Sabha poll campaign in Wayanad out of fear of BJP.

Taking a dig at its main political opponent in Kerala, CPI(M) state Secretary MV Govindan said though Congress is claiming that their fight is against BJP, their two prominent national leaders- Rahul Gandhi and KC Venugopal- are contesting from the southern state, where the saffron party has no role.

The grand old party did not even dare to raise their party flags or those of IUML during their rallies and campaigns in Wayanad, where Gandhi is seeking a second term in the Lok Sabha, as they were scared of BJP's smear campaign, he alleged.

The leader said it was really interesting to note that Congress could not even raise their flags during the ongoing campaign there.

Govindan recalled how BJP, citing the IUML flag, allegedly propagated that the Pakistan flag was raised along with that of the Congress during Gandhi's Lok Sabha poll campaigns in Wayanad in 2019.

"But, Congress did not show the courage to say that it was not the Pakistan flag but that of their key partner, the IUML...they were also not ready to explain that without the support of the IUML, they won't succeed in Wayanad constituency," he told reporters here.

This time, out of fear of the BJP campaign, they have decided not to use either their flag or that of the IUML, the Left leader alleged.

"The national leadership of the Congress has been forced to abandon their flags out of fear and criticism from BJP. How can a party that is even scared of criticism from the saffron party oppose and fight its fascist ideologies?" he asked.

Govindan also said the upcoming Lok Sabha polls are a fight to retain India as such and to defeat fascism. *—PTI*

**WINDS OF CHANGE?**

# INDIA bloc will win from Ghaziabad to Ghazipur: Akhilesh

**GHAZIABAD, 17 APRIL**

Asserting that "winds of change" are blowing from western Uttar Pradesh, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday said there will be an INDIA bloc "clean sweep" from Ghaziabad to Ghazipur.

He also urged the people to ensure that their votes are not divided and asked them to guard their booths to ensure a wipeout of BJP.

Yadav made the remarks during a joint press conference with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, their first during the Lok Sabha election cycle.

"The first phase of the Lok Sabha polls in Uttar Pradesh are going to be held. The winds that are blowing from the west are going to change the environment of the whole of Uttar Pradesh and the country," Yadav said with Gandhi and other Congress leaders by his side.

Akhilesh Yadav PHOTO: PTI

He claimed that farmers are distressed as all the BJP's promises and claims have turned out to be a "big lie".

"They (BJP) made claims of double engine, look at their hoardings now, their candidates are missing and only single person is there. After the polls, that person who is alone on the hoardings will also disappear," he said in an apparent swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

- Yadav made the remarks during a joint press conference with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, their first during the Lok Sabha election cycle. He claimed that farmers are distressed as all the BJP's promises and claims have turned out to be a "big lie"

Samajwadi Party and the Congress are contesting the Lok Sabha polls in an alliance in Uttar Pradesh. The Congress is contesting 17 seats while the Samajwadi Party and some other allies are fighting from the remaining 63 seats in the politically crucial state, which sends 80 members to the Lok Sabha. *—PTI*

## EC ASKS PARTIES TO SHARE DETAILS OF CAMPAIGN AIRCRAFT

**MUMBAI, 17 APRIL**

Election Commission of India (ECI) has asked political parties to furnish details of aircraft and helicopters being used for campaigning, including their origin and destination and details of people ferried in them.

A letter by Tejas Samel, Deputy Election Officer of Mumbai Suburban district, dated 12 April, said such information has to be furnished three days before the journey to the district election office, but that duration has now been reduced to 24 hours.

"We are sending a revised letter on 17 April. Instead of three days, they have to inform us 24 hours in advance," Samel told PTI on Tuesday night.

The details should also include the make of the aircraft/helicopter and people travelling in them. *—PTI*

## LS polls: BJP eyes hat-trick as Cong mounts challenge in J&K

**JAMMU, 17 APRIL**

BJP has gone full-throttle with a high-voltage campaign, while Congress seems to have adopted a subdued approach as the parties gear up for a three-cornered contest -- scheduled on 19 April and 26 April -- in the Udhampur and Jammu constituencies.In both 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, ruling BJP secured the Udhampur and Jammu seats with Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh and Jugal Kishore emerging triumphant, respectively. Seeking a hat-trick of wins in the constituencies, BJP is working to fortify its support base. It, however, faces stiff competition from Congress, which has nominated two-time MP Lal Singh in Udhampur and its working president Raman Bhalla in Jammu.BJP's campaign in Jammu and Kashmir included rallies by top party leaders, such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah. In contrast,the Congress had only former deputy chief minister of Rajasthan Sachin Pilot and actor-turned-politician Raj Babbar addressing two rallies in the region since the announcement of the polls. *—PTI*

# 4 held in laundering case against Hemant Soren

**RANCHI, 17 APRIL**

Enforcement Directorate (ED) has made four fresh arrests in connection with the alleged illegal land grab-linked money laundering case against former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren and others, official sources said on Wednesday.

Those taken into custody under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) have been identified as Antu Tirkey, Priya Ranjan Sahay, Bipin Singh and Irshad, they said.

ED had on Tuesday conducted searches at the premises of Tirkey and some others here and the four were arrested following their questioning.

Sahay "forged" some land-related documents along with others, according to the charge sheet filed in the case. With these arrests, the total number of people taken into custody in this case has risen to eight.

Soren, 48, was arrested by ED in January shortly after he resigned as the chief minister.

Hemant Soren PHOTO: PTI

He is currently lodged in Birsa Munda jail at Hotwar here under judicial custody. Prime accused and former revenue department sub-inspector Bhanu Pratap Prasad, Mohammed Saddam Hussain and Afshar Ali have also been arrested.

The probe against Soren pertains to an 8.86-acre plot of land in Ranchi that the ED has alleged was illegally acquired by him. Soren had moved a bail petition before a special court in Ranchi on Tuesday, alleging that his arrest was politically motivated and part of a conspiracy to coerce him to join BJP. *—PTI*

# TMC manifesto says no to CAA

**KOLKATA, 17 APRIL**

Trinamool Congress (TMC), which is contesting solo in West Bengal after failing to reach a seat-sharing agreement with its INDIA bloc partners in the state, released its manifesto for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in Kolkata on Wednesday.

"Today's manifesto is what we are committed to do when TMC as part of INDIA will form the Union Government," TMC Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien said at a joint press conference with Principal Chief Advisor to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Amit Mitra and State Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya on Wednesday.

TMC which is in staunch Opposition to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), promised to do away with the controversial legislation once it comes to power at the Centre along with the INDIA bloc. TMC also promised legal guarantee of Minimum Support Prices to all farmers as per Swaminathan Commission's recommendations. The MSP will be set at a minimum of 50 per cent higher than the average cost of production of all crops, the party said.

TMC leaders Amit Mitra and Derek O'Brien release the party's election manifesto, in Kolkata, on Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

The party said, that the cost of petrol, diesel and LPG cylinders will be capped to ensure affordability. It also promised to establish a 'Price Stabilisation Fund' to manage fluctuations in prices.

For women, the party has announced scholarship for girl students in line with Kanyashree scheme and financial aid for all women akin to Lakshmir Bhandar.

TMC has also promised to replace the Ayushman Bharat health insurance program with a stronger health insurance program with an increased cover of Rs 10 Lakh in line with that of West Bengal.

The party announced that it will increase the number of higher education scholarships for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes students. It has also promised to increase Old Age Pension for individuals aged 60 and above to Rs 1,000 per month. *—ANI*

## BJP FILES COMPLAINT AGAINST MAMATA ON POLL VIOLATIONS

**KOLKATA, 17 APRIL**

BJP on Wednesday filed a complaint with the Election Commission (EC) against West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, alleging that she tried to incite voters to violence while addressing a public meeting.

Banerjee, addressing an election rally at Maynaguri in Jalpaiguri district on Tuesday, claimed that some BJP members shouted "chor chor" targeting her convoy in the Chalsa area.

BJP, in its complaint to the EC, claimed that she had said, "They had the courage to say chor chor on seeing my car, if I had the opportunity would have pulled their tongues out, because of elections I did not say anything."

Alleging that she attempted to "incite the voters to violence while addressing a public gathering", BJP said this is "expressly prohibited under the electoral laws of the land". *—PTI*

# Odisha CM to contest from two Assembly seats

**BHUBANESWAR, 17 APRIL**

BJD President and Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik will also contest from Kantabanji Assembly constituency in Bolangir district of Western Odisha along with his traditional Hinjili seat in Ganjam district.

This was announced by Patnaik himself on Wednesday while releasing the 5th list of nine candidates for the Assembly elections in the state. Nine BJD candidates announced included six women and four turncoats. The party has dropped four sitting MLAs - Purna Chandra Baka (Chitrakonda), Kishore Chandra Naik (Kuchinda),

Naveen Patnaik PHOTO: PTI

Rajnikant Singh (Angul) and Samir Ranjan Dash (Nimapara).The six women candidates are Laxmipriya Nayak (Chitrakonda), Barsa Singh Bariha (Padampur), Arundhati Devi (Deogarh), Sanjukta Singh (Angul), Sulkhnsa Gitanajali Devi (Samakhemundi) and Dr Indira Nanda (Jeypore). *—PTI*

**ALL EYES ON THOOTHUKUDI**

# *Winning not an uphill task for Kanimozhi*

**THOOTHUKUDI, 17 APRIL**

The presence of a medical doctor, managing director of a bone and joint treatment centre and a DMK leader seeking re-election makes the contest in Thoothukudi Lok Sabha constituency a keenly watched one.

Environmental concerns over the copper smelter plant and the apprehension of fishermen by Sri Lankan authorities are also among the numerous issues in this constituency.

Though DMK Deputy General Secretary Kanimozhi, seeking re-election, is making a hectic bid to build public ire against BJP government, her contenders accuse DMK of not reaching out to all the families affected by the devastating floods in December 2023.

Udhayanidhi Stalin, Kanimozhi PHOTO: PTI

A section of the public too feel they have not received any succour from the state government when they were marooned.

"I did not receive any help from the government after I lost my house and also my livelihood to the floods. So, I may think twice before voting for the DMK," says Pakiamma, a daily wage earner, from Thoothukudi, which is also known as Tuticorin or Pearl City. The devastating floods had crippled life and affected agriculture and industries. And to make matters worse, power supply could not be restored in many areas for several days.

Kanimozhi made a debut in the 2019 Lok Sabha election and won by trouncing her rival and BJP candidate Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan, who has now relocated to Chennai South constituency after giving up her position as Governor. *—PTI*

## Unseasonal rains claim 10 lives in M'rashtra in a week

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 17APRIL

Unseasonal rains have claimed the lives of 10 people and 150 animals in Marathwada region of Maharashtra in a week's time since 9 April , a primary survey report prepared by the state revenue department said. The Marathwada region comprises eight districts - Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, Jalna, Beed, Parbhani, Latur, Nanded, Dharashiv and Hingoli. The report said that spells of unseasonal rains lashed parts of Marathwada since 9 April, causing loss of human and animal lives. The rainfall and hailstorms also damaged over 450 houses in 481 villages across the region. Crops belonging to 9,127 farmers were affected by unseasonal rains and hailstorms, it said. 152 animals, including 117 milch animals, lost their lives in the unseasonal rains, it said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

## Odisha schools to be closed from 18 April for heatwave

BHUBANESWAR, 17 APRIL

Odisha government on Wednesday announced the closure of all schools in the state from 18-20 April in view of the India Meteorological Department's (IMD) heatwave forecast. In a press statement, the School and Mass Education Department said the government has decided to close down all schools including those run by the government, government-aided and private for three days in view of prevailing heatwave conditions and rise in day temperature. As per IMD's forecast, the temperature is likely to rise gradually by 2 to 4 degrees Celsius at many places during the next two days. Baripada town in Mayurbhanj district was the hottest place in the entire country on Tuesday with a temperature of 43.6 degrees Celsius, weather scientist Umashankar Das said. *—PTI*

## Kashmir boat tragedy: Search on for the missing

SRINAGAR, 17 APRIL

Rescuers searched the Jhelum waters on Wednesday for three people who went missing after a boat capsized in the river the day before, claiming six lives, officials said. The search operation resumed in the morning. Teams of State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and Jammu and Kashmir Police are engaged in the operation, they said. According to the officials, three people are missing. The boat, which was carrying mostly schoolchildren, capsized in the Gandbal Nowgam area here on Tuesday. Six people were pulled out of the Jhelum river, which has swollen over the last couple of days due to incessant rains in the Kashmir valley. 19 people were on board, out of which six drowned and 10 were rescued. *—PTI*

## Kerala police book female tourists for vandalism

KOCHI, 17 APRIL

Police have registered a case against two female foreign tourists for allegedly destroying pro-Palestine boards erected by an Islamist student outfit in this port city. Police said the incident was reported from the Fort Kochi police station limit on Monday evening. Police said the boards had contained protest messages against Israel for its attack on Palestinian territory. Meanwhile, a video circulated through social media showed a woman tourist engaging in heated arguments allegedly with SIO activists after tearing down the banners. *—PTI*

# India's population estimated at 144 cr: UNFPA

### 24% of population is aged 0-14, 17% falls within 10-19 age grp

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

India's population is estimated to have reached 144 crore, with 24 per cent in the 0-14 age bracket, according to a recent report by the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA)

The UNFPA's State of World Population - 2024 report -- "Interwoven Lives, Threads of Hope: Ending Inequalities in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights" -- revealed that India's population is estimated to double in 77 years.

India leads globally with an estimated population of 144.17 crore, followed by China at 142.5 crore, according to the report.

India's population was recorded at 121 crore during the last census, conducted in 2011.

The report further detailed that an estimated 24 per cent of India's population is aged 0-14 while 17 per cent is within the 10-19 age range.

According to the report, the child marriage percentage in India was at 23 between 2006-2023 PHOTO: PTI

The segment aged 10-24 is estimated to constitute 26 per cent, with the 15-64 age group making up 68 per cent. Additionally, 7 per cent of India's population is aged 65 years and above, with men having a life expectancy of 71 years and women 74 years.

The report has found that 30 years of progress in sexual and reproductive health has mostly ignored the most marginalised communities worldwide.

According to the report, the child marriage percentage in India was at 23 between 2006-2023.

The report noted that maternal deaths in India have fallen considerably, accounting for 8 per cent of all such fatalities worldwide.

However, the report noted that India continues to see dramatic inequities in maternal death risk.

Quoting a report on "Estimates and Correlates of District-Level Maternal Mortality Ratio in India" by PLOS Global Public Health, the UNFPA said recent research into India's 640 districts revealed that while nearly a third achieved the sustainable development goal of reducing maternal mortality ratio below 70 per 100,000 live births, 114 districts still have ratios of 210 or more.

The report noted that women with disabilities are up to 10 times more likely to experience gender-based violence than their peers without disabilities. *—PTI*

**RAM NAVAMI**

Girls being worshipped during 'Kumari Puja' on the occasion of 'Ram Navami' festival, at the Dakshineswar Ramkrishna Sangha Adyapeath, in Kolkata, on Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

## Biren: Peace talks can't compromise Manipur issues

IMPHAL, 17 APRIL

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Wednesday asserted that any form of peace talks between the warring communities should not compromise the territorial integrity of the state and must ensure the protection of the indigenous population.

Speaking at the launch of the 'Sankalp Patra' at BJP party office here, Singh said, "The peace talks should not compromise the territorial integrity of the state and the well-being of our indigneous people. We will not accept peace negotiations that dilute these fundamental issues."

He added, "During his recent visit, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had unequivocally said the BJP is committed to preserving the unity of Manipur."Singh highlighted Shah's acknowledgment of attempts by illegal immigrants to disrupt the demographic balance in the state, stating, "This fact is unknown to the opposition."

Speaking on the contents of the BJP manifesto, Singh said whatever Prime Minister Narendra Modi promises is always implemented. Singh appealed to people to ensure the victory of BJP's Inner Manipur candidate Basantakumar Singh, who is also a member of the Cabinet sub-committee set up by the state government to identify illegal immigrants in the state.

PHOTO: FB

- Speaking on the contents of the BJP manifesto, Singh said whatever Prime Minister Narendra Modi promises is always implemented. Formal peace talks between apex civil bodies of the Meiteis and Kukis to bring an amicable solution is yet to begin

Formal peace talks between apex civil bodies of the Meiteis and Kukis to bring an amicable solution is yet to begin. *—PTI*

## JNU STUDENTS PROTEST AGAINST VC

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

A group of students at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) held a peaceful demonstration outside Mahanadi hostel on Tuesday evening as part of the university strike, the students' union said.

The students could be seen holding dafli (daf) in their hands, beating it while shouting slogans, as part of their demonstration outside Mahanadi hostel, where Sudhir Mishra's film shooting was underway.

The students' union members alleged that the JNU VC, Prof Santishree D Pandit, is gradually selling out JNU, part by part.

Earlier in the day, students observed a strike over a slew of issues, including the alleged commercialization of the campus and delays in sexual harassment inquiries.

On Monday, the proctor and rector called JNUSU representatives for a dialogue on the issues while pressing demands to call off the strike. However, after rounds of talks with the administration, no concrete, promising gesture was assured by the JNU administration. *—ANI*

**29 NAXALITES KILLED**

Inspector General of Police in Bastar Range Sundarraj Pattilingam and others check the weapons recovered after security personnel gunned down 29 Naxalites in an encounter in Kanker district PHOTO: PTI

# 'Encounter in Kanker huge blow to Maoist wing'

KANKER, 17 APRIL

Police on Wednesday claimed the anti-insurgency operation in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district has dealt a huge blow to Maoists' north Bastar division committee which handles illegal money collection and supply network of the outlawed outfit.

A lot more still needs to be done and the police are heading in the right direction, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P said.

Security personnel gunned down 29 Naxalites, including some senior cadres, in Kanker on Tuesday, in the biggest encounter ever in the state which has been facing Naxal menace since the past three decades. A huge cache of weapons, including AK-47, SLR, Insas and .303 rifles, were recovered from the spot, police said.

The action came ahead of the first phase of polling in Chhattisgarh scheduled on 19 April. Those killed included Shankar Rao and Lalita, both divisional committee members of the outlawed CPI (Maoist), who were carrying a reward of Rs 8 lakh each on their heads, police said.

The encounter took place at the trijunction of Kanker, Narayanpur (in Chhattisgarh) and Gadchiroli (adjoining Maharashtra) which was considered as safe haven for the north Bastar division committee of Maoists, Inspector General of Police Sundarraj P said.

There are 70-80 cadres in the north Bastar division committee of Maoists which has four area committees - Raoghat, Partapur, Kuve and Kisodo, he said. A huge cache of weapons, including AK-47, SLR, Insas and .303 rifles, were recovered from the spot, police said.

The process to identity the killed Naxalites was underway. So far, Shankar Rao and Lalita have been identified, he said, adding that 15 women were among the killed Naxalites.

Prima facie, it seems most of the killed Naxalites belonged to Partapur area committee, he said.

Asked about security arrangements for the Bastar Lok Sabha constituency where polling will be held on April 19, the IG said during the last year's assembly elections, Naxalites tried to indulge in violent activities but proper security arrangements foiled their bids *—PTI*

## MARTYR'S WIDOW IN M'RASHTRA TO GET FINANCIAL AID

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Maharashtra government on Wednesday informed the Bombay High Court that it has decided to grant financial benefits to the family of an Army Major, who was killed in the line of duty in Jammu and Kashmir four years ago.

Aakriti Sood, the widow of Major Anuj Sood, had moved the high court seeking benefits (monetary) for ex-servicemen under two government resolutions of 2019 and 2020.

Major Sood lost his life on 2 May, 2020, when he was rescuing civilian hostages from terrorist hideouts. He was awarded the Shaurya Chakra posthumously.

The state government had initially said Sood's family was not eligible for the benefit and allowance as the resolutions were only for those born in Maharashtra or who have had a continuous stay of 15 years.

The court had said if the government could not do so, then the court would pass appropriate orders. *—ANI*

# T'puram airport to suspend flights for 5 hours on 21 April for religious yatra

T'PURAM, 17 APRIL

Flight services from the international airport here will be suspended for five hours on 21 April for the smooth continuation of the holy 'Painkuni Arattu' procession of Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple across the runway, Thiruvananthapuram International Airport Ltd (TIAL) TIAL said on Wednesday.

TIAL said the flight services would be suspended from 4 pm to 9 pm on 21 April.

It said the updated timings of the flights are available with the respective airlines.The airport has been pausing operations and rescheduling flights twice every year for decades for the ceremonial procession of the shrine to pass through the runway.

The practice of the temple procession taking that path to reach the Shangumugham beach for the holy bath of the idols began centuries ago and it has been continuing even after the establishment of the airport in 1932. When the airport was constructed at the particular place, the then Travancore King Sree Chithira Thirunal had made it clear that facility would be open for public for 363 days in a year and for two days for Lord Padmanabha, the titular deity of the royal family The royal era ritual has been continuing even after the Adani Group took over management of the airport. *—PTI*

According to the airport authorities, updated timings of the flights are available with the respective airlines PHOTO: PTI

**GUARDING THEIR RIGHTS**

# *Govt panel to look into issues of queers*

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The Centre has set up a committee under the Cabinet Secretary to look into the queer community's issues, including measures needed to ensure there is non-discriminatory access to services and that they do not face threats of violence.

The formation of the committee comes after Supreme Court asked the Central government in October to set up a high-powered panel to look into the issues of the queer community.

According to a notification issued on Tuesday, the panel will examine and recommend measures to be taken by the Central and the state governments to ensure that there is no discrimination in access to goods and services to the queer community.

Non-discriminatory access to social welfare entitlements to queer people is also part of the committee's reference PHOTO: PTI

It will also examine measures to be taken so that the queer community does not face any threat of violence, harassment or coercion.

The panel has also been mandated to go into measures to be taken to ensure that queer persons are not subjected to "involuntary" medical treatments and surgeries, including modules to cover mental health.

Non-discriminatory access to social welfare entitlements to queer people is also part of the committee's reference.

The Union Home Secretary, Legislative Secretary, Health Secretary, Women and Child Development Secretary and Social Justice and Empowerment Secretary are the other members of the committee.

The committee may co-opt experts and other officers if deemed necessary, the notification said.

On 17 October, Supreme Court asked the Centre to set up a committee under the Cabinet Secretary to consider benefits for queer persons. *—PTI*

# Cyber attack against Shailaja: 1 booked

T'PURAM, 17 APRIL

Amid the high-octane poll campaign in Kerala, an activist of the Indian Union Muslim League has been booked for allegedly making fake and objectionable remarks through social media platforms against KK Shailaja, senior CPI(M) leader and candidate for the Vadakkara Lok Sabha seat.

The New Mahi police here registered a case on their own against Aslam, a local functionary of Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), amidst widespread criticism against the intense cyber attack against Shailaja for some days. IUML is a key member in the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF). Shailaja is trying her luck in the Vadakara Lok Sabha seat against Congress' Shafi Parambil and the BJP's Praful Krishna.

While ruling CPI(M) alleged that the objectionable campaign was with the knowledge of the UDF candidate, they rejected the charges. Allegations of cyber attacks and apprehensions about bogus voting have marred campaigning in Vadakara constituency, where two sitting MLAs--Shailaja and Parambil -- are fighting to win in the 26 April polls. CPI(M) filed a complaint with the Election Commission (EC) against Parambil, alleging the cyber attack is being done with the knowledge of the candidate and fake campaigns are being conducted by morphing photos and editing conversations.

CPI(M) politburo member Brinda Karat alleged that it was done by the Congress candidate's social media team in Vadakara *—PTI*

EXPERTS QUESTION FOLLOW-THROUGH

# Climate, environment find place in election manifestos

India has experienced significant environmental degradation, with developmental model prioritising rapid industrial and infrastructure growth over ecological balance **PHOTO: PTI**

From a few lines two decades ago to multiple full pages, Lok Sabha election manifestos of two primary national parties in India - BJP and Congress - reflect rising concerns over climate change and environmental degradation.

While policy experts have welcomed the increased attention to these issues, they, however, say many promises have proved to be symbolic considering the contradictory approach governments have taken in certain matters, including forest and wildlife conservation.

Election manifestos represent the political standing of parties and are often discussed, debated, and compared during elections. From international policy to jobs, health, and education, these address a range of issues and help the electorate make an effective decision.

BJP, which released its 69-page election manifesto last Saturday, has dedicated three pages to environment and climate issues under the section Modi Ki Guarantee for Sustainable Bharat , coming a long way from just a paragraph on environment in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections.

The word climate change did not even figure in the 1999 and 2004 manifestos of BJP, currently the world's largest political party.

Congress has allotted two pages for environment, climate, disaster management, and water and sanitation-related issues in its 2024 election manifesto.

A review of its previous Lok Sabha election manifestos shows a strong emphasis on climate change and environmental sustainability issues.

A 2022 study by the Centre for Policy Research noted that Congress has consistently emphasised climate change and environmental sustainability over the last three elections and has discussed specific steps for environmental protection, like green budgeting and the creation of an independent authority to work on it.

According to the study, while BJP dedicates about 11 per cent of its manifesto to environmental issues, left-leaning parties generally highlight water conservation, dedicating around 12 per cent of their content to environmental protection and sustainability.

Key commitments in BJP's latest manifesto include achieving net-zero emissions by 2070, transitioning to non-fossil fuel energy sources, improving river health, achieving national air quality standards in 60 cities, expanding tree cover, and boosting disaster resilience.

Congress has proposed setting up a fund for a green transition and achieving the net-zero goal.

Experts, however, have expressed concerns regarding the lack of specific steps in their manifesto to address environmental challenges.

BJP manifesto does not reflect the issues that ecologists have been raising regarding environmental policies where larger reforms are required, said Debadityo Sinha, a senior resident fellow at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy.

Sinha hoped the government would take steps to protect the existing natural forests and wildlife habitats, strengthen environmental laws, enhance the capacity of authorities, and ensure greater involvement of civil society in environmental decision-making.

Environmental activist and water policy expert Himanshu Thakkar said the UPA government did better when it comes to transparency in such matters compared to the NDA government.

He said Congress government was responsive to civil society, which is the biggest advocate for environmental protection and sustainability.

For example: The UPA listened to us and decided not to take up the Ken-Betwa River Interlinking Project which will completely destroy the Panna tiger reserve and large tracts of forests. BJP government is suppressing the voices of dissent, he claimed.

The river-interlinking project aims to transfer surplus water from the Ken river in Madhya Pradesh to Betwa in Uttar Pradesh to irrigate the drought-prone Bundelkhand region. Both Ken and Betwa are the tributaries of the Yamuna.

BJP government has not done anything noteworthy on 'Namami Gange'; the Aravallis are in a disastrous state. If more of the past is going to happen in the future, it is not going to help, Thakkar said.

Bhavreen Kandhari, an environmentalist working for better air quality in India, said while political parties have begun to acknowledge environmental issues, these concerns are often relegated to the lower sections of their manifestos.

It's crucial that environmental issues are not relegated to the bottom of the priority list, especially given the pressing concerns of air pollution and the climate crisis. This is particularly important as India is home to 83 of the 100 most polluted cities in the world. While their manifestos outline ambitious plans, the real test lies in the execution and governance, which requires strict enforcement of laws, she said.

According to Kandhari, in recent years, India has experienced significant environmental degradation, with a developmental model prioritising rapid industrial and infrastructure growth over ecological balance.

"This has led to extensive deforestation, with over 2.33 million hectares of tree cover lost since 2000. India ranked last among 180 countries in the 2022 Environmental Performance Index due to poor management of air quality, emissions, and water resources," she said.

"The weakening of critical laws like the Forest Conservation Act has allowed unchecked exploitation of natural resources. severe water crises affect major cities due to groundwater depletion, and air pollution remains alarmingly high, with India being home to 42 of the world's 50 most polluted cities as of 2023," she added.

Environmentalists and policy experts have objected to the amendments made to the Forest Conservation Act which rendered a large tract of forests unprotected.

They say the Forest Conservation Rules brought in 2022 diluted the requirement of mandatory Gram Sabha consent before diverting forest land for non-forestry purposes.

They (political parties) promise to increase the tree cover on one hand and destroy pristine forests such as the Hasdeo Aranya in Chhattisgarh for coal mining on the other. The central government diluted environmental and forest laws to help industries. This is contradictory, Alok Shukla, convenor of the Chhattisgarh Bachao Andolan, said.

Parties make big promises and use lofty words, but this is not reflected in their actions, he added. Despite gaining attention in elections, environmental issues remain secondary to livelihood concerns in the broader political discourse, experts say.

One reason for this, they say, is that political and social movements in India predominantly focus on livelihood issues.

*—PTI*

SALAR سالار

# Ukraine runs low on arms & may face defeat this year

The former commander of the UK's Joint Forces Command has warned that Ukraine could face defeat by Russia in 2024.

General Sir Richard Barrons has told the BBC there is "a serious risk" of Ukraine losing the war this year.

The reason, he says, is "because Ukraine may come to feel it can't win".

"And when it gets to that point, why will people want to fight and die any longer, just to defend the indefensible?"

Last year the Russians knew exactly where Ukraine was likely to attack - from the direction of Zaporizhzhia **PHOTO: PTI**

**Ukraine is not yet at that point**

But its forces are running critically low on ammunition, troops and air defences. Its much-heralded counter-offensive last year failed to dislodge the Russians from ground they had seized and now Moscow is gearing up for a summer offensive.

So what will that look like and what are its likely strategic objectives?

"The shape of the Russian offensive that's going to come is pretty clear," says Gen Barrons.

"We are seeing Russia batter away at the front line, employing a five-to-one advantage in artillery, ammunition, and a surplus of people reinforced by the use of newish weapons." These include the FAB glide bomb, an adapted Soviet-era "dumb bomb" fitted with fins, GPS guidance and 1,500kg of high explosive, that is wreaking havoc on Ukrainian defences.

"At some point this summer," says Gen Barrons, "we expect to see a major Russian offensive, with the intent of doing more than smash forward with small gains to perhaps try and break through the Ukrainian lines.

"And if that happens we would run the risk of Russian forces breaking through and then exploiting into areas of Ukraine where the Ukrainian armed forces cannot stop them."

**But where?**

Last year the Russians knew exactly where Ukraine was likely to attack - from the direction of Zaporizhzhia south towards the Sea of Azov. They planned accordingly and successfully blunted Ukraine's advance. "One of the challenges the Ukrainians have," says Dr Jack Watling, senior research fellow in land warfare at the Whitehall think-tank the Royal United Services Institute (Rusi), "is that the Russians can choose where they commit their forces. "It's a very long front line and the Ukrainians need to be able to defend all of it."

**How can Ukraine grow its army?**

"The Ukrainian military will lose ground," says Dr Watling. "The question is: how much and which population centres are going to be affected?"

It is quite possible that Russia's General Staff have yet to go firm on which direction to designate as their main effort. But it is possible to broadly break down their various options into three broad locations.

**Kharkiv**

"Kharkiv," says Dr Watling, "is certainly vulnerable." As Ukraine's second city, situated perilously close to the Russian border, Kharkiv is a tempting goal for Moscow.

It is currently being pummelled daily with Russian missile strikes, with Ukraine unable to field sufficient air defences to ward off the lethal mix of drones, cruise and ballistic missiles aimed in its direction. "I think the offensive this year will have breaking out of the Donbas as its first objective," adds Gen Barrons, "and their eye will be on Kharkiv which is 29km [18 miles] or so from the Russian border, a major prize."

Could Ukraine still function as a viable entity if Kharkiv were to fall? Yes, say analysts, but it would be a catastrophic blow to both its morale and its economy.

The Donbas

The area of eastern Ukraine known collectively as the Donbas has been at war since 2014, when Moscow-backed separatists declared themselves "people's republics".

In 2022 Russia illegally annexed the two Donbas oblasts, or provinces, of Donetsk and Luhansk. This is where most of the fighting on land has been taking place over the past 18 months.

Ukraine has, controversially, expended enormous efforts, in both manpower and resources, in trying to hold on to first the town of Bakhmut, and then Avdiivka.

It has lost both, as well as some of its best fighting troops, in the attempt.

Kyiv has countered that its resistance has inflicted disproportionately high casualties on the Russians.

That is true, with the battlefield in these places being dubbed "the meat grinder".

But Moscow has plenty more troops to throw into the fight - and Ukraine does not.

The Commander of US Forces in Europe, General Christopher Cavoli, has warned that unless the US rushes significantly more weapons and ammunition to Ukraine then its forces will be outgunned on the battlefield by ten to one.

Mass matters. The Russian army's tactics, leadership and equipment may be inferior to Ukraine's, but it has such superiority in numbers, especially artillery, that if it does nothing else this year, its default option will be to keep pushing Ukraine's forces back in a westward direction, taking village after village.

**Zaporizhzhia**

This, too, is a tempting prize for Moscow.

The southern Ukrainian city of more than 700,000 (in peacetime) sits dangerously close to the Russian front lines.

It is also something of a thorn in Russia's side given that it is the capital of an oblast of the same name that Russia has illegally annexed, and yet the city is still living freely in Ukrainian hands.

But the formidable defences that Russia built south of Zaporizhzhia last year, in the correct expectation of a Ukrainian attack, would now complicate a Russian advance from there.

The so-called Surovikin Line, consisting of triple layers of defences, is laced with the largest, most densely packed minefield in the world. Russia could partially dismantle this but its preparations would probably be detected. Russia's strategic objective this year may not even be territorial. It could simply be to crush Ukraine's fighting spirit and convince its Western backers that this war is a lost cause.

Dr Jack Watling believes the Russian objective is "to try to generate a sense of hopelessness".

*—BBC News*

LETTERS

write to us at salar@salar.news

# *Govt must bridge funding gap for India to become a science powerhouse*

General election begins this week. Nearly 1 billion voters are eligible to go to the polls in a marathon exercise, starting on 19 April and ending on 1 June.

Opinion polls are projecting that an alliance of parties led by BJP will win a third consecutive term against an alliance of Opposition parties led by Congress. The winner will take charge of the world's fifth-largest economy. According to projections, India could become the third-largest economy, behind China and the United States, by the end of the decade.

Along with being an economic power, India is also more than ready to take the next step towards becoming a science powerhouse. This is not yet a given, but it can happen. Researchers told Nature's news team that basic research has been neglected by successive governments, and that a thriving research system needs much greater autonomy. In this editorial, we discuss a third aspect: how to bridge the funding gap. One thing India's government can do is to boost science spending by encouraging businesses to contribute more, as is the case for other leading economies (see 'R&D spending in the world's top-five economies'). If policymakers and industrialists can get this right, an opportunity to put rocket boosters under the country's impressive scientific achievements is there for the taking.

In this editorial, we discuss a third aspect: how to bridge the funding gap. One thing India's government can do is to boost science spending by encouraging businesses to contribute more, as is the case for other leading economies. If policymakers and industrialists can get this right, an opportunity to put rocket boosters under the country's impressive scientific achievements is there for the taking.

There is, indeed, much to build on. According to government data, in 2021–22, India had the world's third-largest pharmaceutical industry by volume and was the leading supplier of affordable medicines and generic drugs, some of which were crucial to fighting the Covid-19 pandemic worldwide. Last year, India became the fourth country ever to achieve a soft Moon landing and the first to land near the lunar south pole. It also has the world's largest constellation of remote-sensing satellites.

India is among the world's most prolific countries in terms of research output, after the United States and China. From 2014 to 2021, the number of universities increased from 760 to 1,113. In the past decade, seven more Indian Institutes of Technology — the country's network of education and research centres — have been set up, raising the total to 23. In the same period, two new Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research were also established.

If policymakers and industrialists can get this right, an opportunity to put rocket boosters under the country's impressive scientific achievements is there for the taking **PHOTO: PTI**

Now consider that these gains were achieved by a nation that spent just 0.64 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on research and development (R&D) during 2020–21, the latest period for which the Department of Science and Technology (DST) has published data. Whichever political group is elected, it must consider how to increase the country's R&D spending, as well as what could be achieved with more money.

In 2022, the average R&D expenditure of the 38 high-income countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was around 2.7 per cent, according to data published last month. In 2021, China spent 2.4 per cent on R&D, according to World Bank data.

In absolute terms, India's science spending, adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP), increased from the equivalent of US$50.3 billion in 2014–15 to $57.9 billion in 2020–21, according to DST data. PPP is a measure of the buying power of a currency in different countries. What matters more, including for the purposes of international comparisons, is the share of R&D as a fraction of GDP. After economic reforms were introduced in 1991, India's share of R&D spending rose steadily, peaking in 2009–10 at 0.82 per cent of GDP before declining to its present levels, according to DST data.

**Splitting the costs**

One thing stands out when the components of India's science spending are compared with similarly sized economies. Around 60 per cent of India's research spending can be traced to central and state governments and universities, and around 40 per cent to the private sector.

In comparable nations, there is often much more private-sector funding. In 2022, the private sector contributed, on average, 74 per cent of OECD nations' R&D spending and 66 per cent of such funding for the 27 members of the European Union. India today has many global companies in construction, information technology, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals and more. They could be contributing a lot more to the nation's research — both in terms of funding researchers and also infrastructure.

Last August, the Indian parliament approved a bill authorizing the establishment of a funding agency, the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF). It was charged with disbursing Rs 500 billion to universities and laboratories over 5 years — with 70 per cent of it from non-governmental sources, such as philanthropists and industry. Once established, the ANRF must, once and for all, break perceptions about the neglect of basic research. But ANRF is still only one piece in a larger jigsaw puzzle. The incoming government, alongside the country's many corporations, will need to look harder at how it can further boost investment in science. As the DST's own data clearly show, India's corporations, especially, can, and should be a lot more generous.

Overall, public and private investment in science boosts economies and, by extension, societies, health and well-being. This knowledge has helped the public and private sectors of some of the world's leading economies to prioritize science in their budgets. They know what these research investments can achieve.

*—Courtesy, Nature*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

## Croatia votes in poll with corruption as top concern

**ZAGREB, 17 APRIL**

Croatia is voting Wednesday in a parliamentary election after a campaign that centered on a bitter rivalry between the president and prime minister of the country. The ballot pits conservative Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), led by Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, against an alliance of centrist and left-wing parties informally led by populist President Zoran Milanovic and his Social Democratic Party (SDP). The election is being held as Croatia, a European Union and NATO member, struggles with the highest inflation rate in the eurozone, a labor shortage, illegal migration and reports of widespread corruption. At stake in the race for Croatia's 151-seat parliament is not just the Adriatic Sea country's future domestic policies but also the EU's unity as it grapples with the instability from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. *—AP*

## Boeing blowout cost it $200m: United Airlines

**CHICAGO, 17 APRIL**

United Airlines has blamed Boeing for a $200m (£161m) hit to its earnings in the first three months of this year. The carrier was forced to ground its Boeing 737 MAX 9 fleet for three weeks after a mid-air cabin blowout on an Alaska Airlines flight in January. United said that pushed it to a pre-tax loss of $164m for the first quarter. The airline said it "would have reported a quarterly profit" otherwise. However, the loss was smaller than Wall Street expected and United's shares rose by more than 5% after the announcement. United has 79 Boeing 737 MAX 9s in its fleet, more than any of its rivals, and second only to Alaska Airlines. United and Alaska were forced to cancel thousands of flights as inspections were carried out in January before the US aviation regulator cleared the planes to resume flying. *—BBC News*

## Death toll from 4 days of rains rises to 63 in Pakistan

**PESHAWAR, 17 APRIL**

Lightning and heavy rains led to 14 deaths in Pakistan, officials said Wednesday, bringing the death toll from four days of extreme weather to at least 63, as the heaviest downpour in decades flooded villages on the country's southwestern coast. Most of the deaths were reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, in Pakistan's northwest bordering Afghanistan. Collapsing buildings have killed 32 people, including 15 children and five women, said Khursheed Anwar, a spokesman for the Disaster Management Authority. Dozens more were also injured in the northwest, where 1,370 houses were damaged, Anwar said. *—AP*

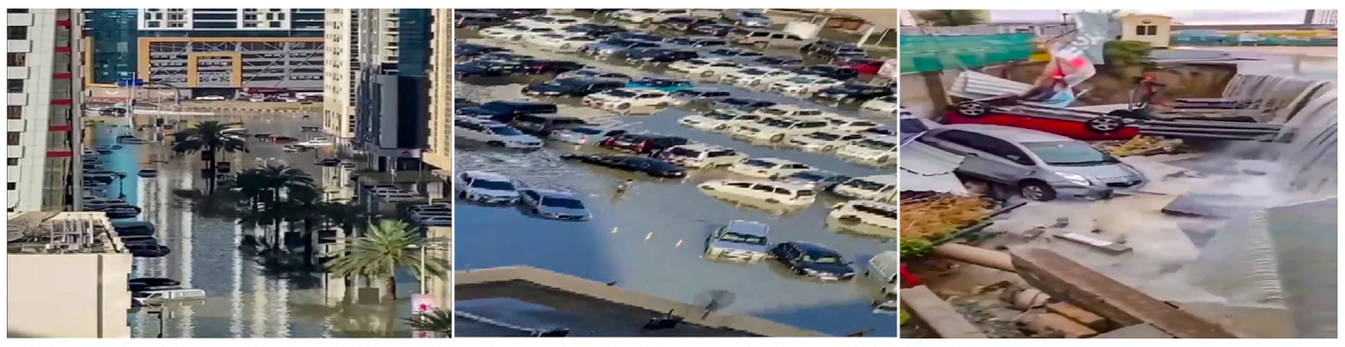
## 4 shot, 1 fatally, in US by shooters on scooters

**NEW YORK, 17 APRIL**

Four people were shot — one fatally — on a street corner in the Bronx by shooters who were riding on scooters, police said. About 10 shots were fired after two scooters pulled up to the intersection after 6 pm Tuesday and passengers on the back of each pulled out guns, Assistant Police Chief Benjamin Gurley said. Three victims standing on the street corner, ranging in age from 23 to 37, suffered gunshot wounds to their legs. The fourth, a 29-year-old man, was hit in the legs and chest and later died, Gurley said. "The perpetrators wore masks and hoodies to block their identities and then they fled on the scooters northbound," Gurley said. One person was taken into custody for questioning Tuesday night. But Gurley said police were unsure if that person was involved in the shooting. *—AP*

# Dubai Floods: Fierce storm lashes UAE, flights diverted

### Authorities in Oman said at least 18 people had been killed



Dubai: A combo of pictures showing vehicles partially submerged on flooded streets after heavy rainfall, in Dubai on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

**DUBAI, 17 APRIL**

Heavy rain has battered some Gulf states, causing flash flooding across the region and leading to flights to the world's busiest international airport being diverted.

Dubai Airport said operations were "temporarily diverted" - though they have since restarted. Authorities in Oman said at least 18 people had been killed by floods. Several states recorded nearly a year's worth of rain in a day.

Unverified video from Dubai International Airport appeared to show jets leaving waves in their wake as they made their way down flooded runways. In a statement, the airport said inbound flights due to arrive on Tuesday evening had been diverted "due to the continued exceptional weather event currently being experienced in the UAE".

Departures would continue to operate, it added. Flights later restarted after an interruption of about two hours. On Tuesday morning, the UAE's National Centre of Meteorology issued a weather warning for large swathes of the country, including Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah. The Gulf region is usually known for hot and dry weather, though heavy rains causing flooding have also occurred with greater regularity in recent years.

In neighbouring Oman, authorities said the death toll from flash floods had increased to 18, with some still missing. The dead included 10 students aged between 10 and 15 who were killed on 14 April when the vehicle they were travelling in attempted to cross a flooded area but was swept away.

In Bahrain, footage showed cars stranded in flooded roads. Scientists have linked the unusual weather to climate change, saying exceptional storms will become more common in future as the planet warms.

For every 1C rise in average temperature, the atmosphere can hold about 7% more moisture. This can result in more droplets and heavier rainfall, sometimes in a shorter space of time and over a smaller area.

*—BBC News*

| Al Ain: | Dubai: |
|---|---|
| 265 mm | 97 mm |

# 50,000 Russian soldiers confirmed dead by BBC

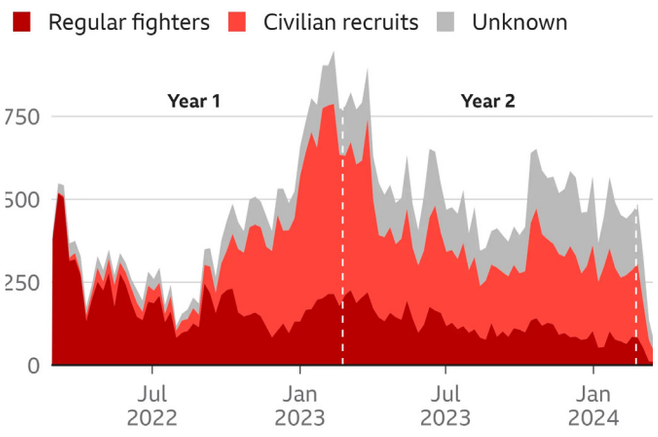
**MOSCOW, 17 APRIL**

Russia's military death toll in Ukraine has now passed the 50,000 mark, BBC can confirm.

In the second 12 months on the front line - as Moscow pushed its so-called meat grinder strategy - we found the body count was nearly 25 per cent higher than in the first year. BBC Russian, independent media group Mediazona and volunteers have been counting deaths since February 2022.

New graves in cemeteries helped provide the names of many soldiers. Our teams also combed through open-source information from official reports, newspapers and social media. More than 27,300 Russian soldiers died in the second year of combat - according to our findings - a reflection of how territorial gains have come at a huge human cost.

Russia has declined to comment. The term meat grinder has been used to describe the way Moscow sends waves of soldiers forward relentlessly to try to wear down Ukrainian forces and expose their locations to Russian artillery.




The graph shows how the Russian military suffered a sharp spike in the number of deaths in January 2023, as it began a large-scale offensive in the Donetsk region of Ukraine *PHOTO: BBC*

The overall death toll - of more than 50,000 - is eight times higher than the only official public acknowledgement of fatality numbers ever given by Moscow in September 2022. The actual number of Russian deaths is likely to be much higher.

BBC and Mediazona's latest list of dead soldiers shows the stark human cost of Russia's changing front-line tactics.

*—BBC News*

## 10 dead in Russian missile strike on Ukrainian City

**CHERNIHIV, 17 APRIL**

A Russian missile attack has killed 10 people in the city of Chernihiv in northern Ukraine, according to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Zelenskyy said another 20 people were wounded in the attack, which hit an eight-storey building in a densely populated area. Three missiles had struck close to the centre of the city, officials said. The attack came hours after reports of a Ukrainian attack on a Russian military airfield in occupied Crimea. Details have yet to be confirmed, although local social media channels shared video of an apparent fire on the airfield at Dzhankoy in northern Crimea. In Chernihiv, acting mayor Oleksandr Lomako said one building had suffered a direct hit from one of the Russian missiles and several floors had been damaged. Video from the scene showed people getting off a trolley bus and diving for cover in the city. Officials appealed for the public to come forward to give blood. *—BBC*

# EU leaders meet to discuss Ukraine, Middle East issue

**BRUSSELS, 17 APRILS**

European leaders' discussions at a summit in Brussels were set to focus on the bloc's competitiveness in the face of increased competition from the United States and China.

Tensions in the Middle East and the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine decided otherwise and the 27 leaders will dedicate Wednesday evening talks to foreign affairs. As the unprecedented attack by Iran on Israel ratcheted up regional tensions and raised fears of a wider war, EU leaders will urge "all parties to exercise utmost restraint and refrain from any action that may increase tensions in the region," according to a draft of their summit conclusions.

Following a video meeting of the bloc's foreign affairs ministers on Tuesday, the EU's top diplomat Josep Borrell said the EU will also consider further sanctioning Iran. "This may entail expanding the scope of the existing regime targeting Iran's military support of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine through drones, to include the possibility to sanction Iranian missiles as well as drone deliveries to Iranian proxies in the Middle East," the European Council said.

Leaders from the bloc should also reiterate their call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the release of hostages, "as well as increasing humanitarian aid at scale to Palestinians in need." Tensions in the region have ramped up since the start of the latest Israel-Hamas war on 7 October, when Hamas and Islamic Jihad, two militant groups backed by Iran, carried out a devastating cross-border attack that killed 1,200 people in Israel and kidnapped 250 others.

Russia's two-year war in Ukraine is also on the agenda, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy expected to address the meeting remotely. He has pleaded with allies for more Patriot missile systems. Since the full-scale invasion began in February 2022, Russia has captured nearly a quarter of Ukraine, which is outnumbered, outgunned and in desperate need of more troops and ammunition, as doubt increases about Western military aid.

Zelenskyy repeatedly said Ukraine must bolster its air defences and replenish its ammunition supplies amid Russian pushes along the front line. *—AP*

**This may entail expanding the scope of the existing regime targeting Iran's military support of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine through drones, to include the possibility to sanction Iranian missiles as well as drone deliveries to Iranian proxies in the Middle East**

-Diplomat Josep Borrell

## Singapore's Oppn leader appoints lawyers to defend him

**SINGAPORE, 17 APRIL**

Leader of Opposition in Singapore Pritam Singh has hired lawyers to defend him against the two charges the Indian-origin lawmaker is facing of lying to a Committee of Privileges in Parliament over the case of his fellow legislator Raeesah Khan.

The 47-year-old Secretary-General of the Workers' Party was represented by two lawyers on Wednesday at a pre-trial conference in the State Courts -- an administrative hearing to prepare the prosecution and the accused for trial. Pre-trial conferences are usually held in chambers and are inaccessible to the media or the public. They can also be held over Zoom video calls.

Singh was newly represented by lawyers Andre Darius Jumabhoy and Aristotle Emmanuel Eng Zhen Yang, Channel News Asia reported. A note in the court's system indicated that the pre-trial conference would be adjourned to 31 May.

The two charges Singh faces allege that he wilfully made a false answer on 10 December and 15 December, 2021, in the public hearing room at Parliament House. This was during an inquiry before the Committee of Privileges, centring on the case of Raeesah Khan, who had lied over a sexual assault case and accused the police of mishandling the case.

Leader of Opposition in Singapore Pritam Singh *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

Singh allegedly testified falsely that he had wanted Khan to clarify what she said in Parliament about accompanying a rape victim to a police station and that he spoke to Khan to convey to her that she had to clarify what she said over the same issue. Singh pleaded not guilty when first charged in court on 19 March.

*—PTI*

GRIM SITUATION

# Iran's prez warns of 'massive' response if Israel attacks

**TEHRAN, 17 APRIL**

Iran's President has warned that the "tiniest invasion" by Israel would bring a "massive and harsh" response, as the region braces for potential Israeli retaliation after Iran's attack over the weekend.

President Ebrahim Raisi spoke Wednesday at an annual army parade that was relocated to a barracks north of the capital, Tehran, from its usual venue on a highway in the city's southern outskirts. Iranian authorities gave no explanation for its relocation, and state TV did not broadcast it live, as it has in previous years.

Iran launched hundreds of missiles and drones at Israel over the weekend in response to an apparent Israeli strike on Iran's embassy compound in Syria on 1 April that killed 12 people, including two Iranian generals.

Israel, with help from the United States, the United Kingdom, neighbouring Jordan and other nations, successfully intercepted nearly all the missiles and drones. Tensions in the region have increased since the start of the latest Israel-Hamas war on 7 October, when Hamas and Islamic Jihad, two militant groups backed by Iran, carried out a cross-border attack that killed 1,200 people in Israel and kidnapped 250 others. Israel responded with an offensive in Gaza that has caused widespread devastation and killed over 33,800 people, according to local health officials. *—PTI*

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

- Iran launched hundreds of missiles and drones at Israel over the weekend in response to an apparent Israeli strike on Iran's embassy compound in Syria

Benjamin Netanyahu and Rishi Sunak *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

## Sunak tells Netanyahu 'calm heads' needed

**LONDON, 17 APRIL**

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has called on his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu to exercise restraint and let "calm heads" prevail in the wake of Iran's missile attacks as his Foreign Secretary David Cameron landed in Tel Aviv for talks on Wednesday.

In a phone call, Sunak reiterated the UK's "steadfast support" for regional stability and told the Israeli leader that Iran had miscalculated its move, being isolated on the global stage as a result.

Netanyahu is said to have thanked Britain for its "rapid and robust" support in the face of Iran's unprecedented direct attack on Israel on Saturday.

"The Prime Minister said Iran had badly miscalculated and was increasingly isolated on the global stage, with the G7 coordinating a diplomatic response," Downing Street said.

"He stressed that significant escalation was in no one's interest and would only deepen insecurity in the Middle East. This was a moment for calm heads to prevail," the statement said. On the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza, Sunak told Netanyahu that he remained gravely concerned about the deepening humanitarian crisis.

*—PTI*

NEW DIPLOMACY

# *Solomon islands vote to shape ties with China*

**HONIARA, 17 APRIL**

Voting began across the Solomon Islands on Wednesday in the South Pacific nation's first general election since the government switched diplomatic allegiances from Taiwan to Beijing and struck a secret security pact that has raised fears of the Chinese navy gaining a foothold in the region.

Solomons' closer relationship with China and a troubled domestic economy will be weighing on voters' minds as they cast their ballots. As many as 4,20,000 registered voters will have their say across 50 national seats on Wednesday.

For the first time, the national vote also coincides with elections for eight of the 10 local governments. Esther Maeluma cast her vote in the National Art Gallery in the capital Honiara and said it seemed busier than the last national election in 2019.

"I want my country and the economy to be good and that's why I chose my candidate," she said outside a polling station. Some voters queued outside polling stations from 4 am local time (17:00 GMT) — three hours before polling began — with many more flocking to booths early after seeing the growing crowds.

A voter casts his ballot during the Solomon Islands' elections in the capital Honiara on Wednesday *PHOTO: AP/PTI*

With early voting available to a select few, voters have spent recent days travelling back to home electorates, quietening the streets of Honiara and forcing the nation's main hospital to enter crisis mode due to a lack of staff. "I didn't used to vote, but now I can see that maybe my vote can change the system and the country," hospital worker Loretta Maeohu said.

The United States has been working to build diplomatic bridges with South Pacific island nations since Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare signed the security pact with China.

Russia's Sputnik news agency last week published an article featuring anonymous claims that the United States was planning an "electoral coup" in the Solomon Islands, which were repeated in an article published by the Chinese Communist Party's Global Times newspaper. Links to the articles have been posted on social media. *—AP*

# ‘India not reaping benefits of demographic dividend’

## Raghuram Rajan said that there is a need to focus on improving the human capital and enhancing their skill sets

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

India is not reaping the benefits of demographic dividends, former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan said on Tuesday, emphasising that there is a need to focus on improving the human capital and enhancing their skill sets.

“I think we are in the midst of it (demographic dividend), but the problem is we are not reaping the benefits,” Rajan said at a conference on “Making India an Advanced Economy by 2047: What Will it Take” at the George Washington University here.

“That’s why I said 6 per cent growth. If you think that’s about what we are right now, take away the fluff in the GDP numbers. That 6 per cent is in the midst of a demographic dividend. It is much below where China and Korea were when they reaped their demographic dividend.

“And that’s why I’m saying we are being overly complicit when we say this is great. This is not because we are losing the demographic dividend because we are not giving those guys jobs,” the former RBI governor said.

“And that leads us to the question, how do we create those jobs? The answer to my mind is partly enhancing the capabilities of the people we have, partly changing the nature of the jobs that are available and we need to work on both fronts.

Former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan **PHOTO: PTI**

“This idea of apprenticeship, which the Congress has in its manifesto, is worth working on. I think there’s a lot that needs to be done to make it effective, but we need many more students to at least be capable of doing a good job,” Rajan said, adding that there also needs to be a focus on job creation.

- India is not reaping the benefits of demographic dividends, former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan said on Tuesday, emphasising that there is a need to focus on improving the human capital and enhancing their skill sets.

Rajan was critical of India spending billions of dollars on chip manufacturing. “Think about these chip factories. So many billions going to subsidise chip manufacturing,” he said, adding that a number of job-intensive areas like leather are not doing good.

“We are going down in those areas. No wonder we have more of a job problem. The job problem was not created in the last 10 years. It’s been growing over the last few decades,” he said.

Responding to a question, Rajan said a lot of Indian innovators now are going to Singapore or to Silicon Valley to set up because they find access to the final markets much easier there.

“We need to ask what is it that forces them to go outside of India to set up rather than stay inside India? But what is really heartwarming is talking to some of these entrepreneurs and seeing their desire to change the world and increasingly many of them are not happy staying in India,” he said.

“They want to actually expand more globally. I think there is a young India that has a Virat Kohli mentality. I’m second to none in the world,” Rajan said.

Earlier in his presentation, Rajan said regardless of whether one picks services, manufacturing, agricultural construction, India has a problem. *—PTI*

## Rupee hits lowest of 83.61 against USD 2nd time in 4 weeks

**MUMBAI, 16 APRIL**

The rupee plunged 17 paise to hit its lowest level of 83.61 against the US dollar for the second time in four weeks on Tuesday, tracking negative equity markets and a strong greenback against major crosses overseas amid geopolitical tensions.

Forex traders said a weak appetite for riskier assets and sustained outflow of foreign capital also dragged down the local unit.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.51 and finally settled at the lowest level of 83.61, registering a loss of 17 paise from its previous close. Earlier the rupee had closed at the same level on March 22 this year.

On Monday, the rupee declined 6 paise to settle at 83.44 against the US dollar.

According to Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, the 10-year US bond yields rose to 4.66 per cent, the highest since November 2023. Weak domestic markets and simmering geopolitical tensions too weighed on the rupee. *—PTI*

## Gold, silver hit fresh peaks on strong global cues

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

Extending gains for the second day in a row, gold and silver prices hit fresh all-time high levels on Tuesday, tracking strong trends in the international markets amid fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East. According to HDFC Securities, gold prices zoomed Rs 700 to hit its lifetime high of Rs 73,750 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday. It had closed at Rs 73,050 per 10 grams on Monday. Similarly, silver price jumped Rs 800 to hit a record high of Rs 86,500 per kg. In the global markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,370 per ounce, up by USD 15 from the previous close.

Gold rose as demand for the haven asset grew amid fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East following Iran’s unprecedented attack on Israel last week. Investors’ attention turned towards a potential counter strike that is likely to increase the risk of starting a full-blown war between the two countries, which spiked the safe haven premium in bullion prices, Gandhi said. Silver was also quoting higher at USD 28.40 per ounce. In the previous close, it had finished at USD 28.25 per ounce. *—PTI*

## Varaha to create carbon credits from 2 million ha in India

**GURUGRAM, 17 APRIL**

Gurugram-based Varaha ClimateAg Pvt Ltd is looking to work with small Indian farmers across 2 million ha by 2028 and generate revenue from carbon credit sales, a top company official said here. Speaking to PTI on the sidelines of Ecosperity Week being held in Singapore from 15-17 April, Varaha CEO and Co-Founder Madhur Jain highlighted the potential of working with small-holding farmers across about one billion hectares of farm lands in SubSahara and Asia. Varaha has started working in Bangladesh and Nepal as well as initiated work in Kenya. Agriculture and allied industries contribute 24 per cent of the global emissions. *—PTI*

## Economy projected to grow 6.5% in 2024, says UNCTAD

**UNITED NATIONS, 17 APR**

India’s economy is projected to grow by 6.5 per cent in 2024, according to a report by the UN. It noted that multinationals extending their manufacturing processes into the country to diversify their supply chains will have a positive impact on Indian exports.

UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in its report released on Tuesday said that India grew by 6.7 per cent in 2023 and is expected to expand by 6.5 per cent in 2024, continuing to be the fastest-growing major economy in the world.

The report also noted the increasing focus by multinationals on India as a manufacturing base as they diversify their supply chains, a reference to China.

Last week, the flagship ‘2024 Financing for Sustainable Development Report: Financing for Development at a Crossroads’ launched at the world body said that investment in South Asia, particularly in India, remains strong.

It added that India is benefiting from growing interest from multinationals, which see the country as an alternative manufacturing base in the context of developed economies’ supply chain diversification strategies, making an apparent reference to China.

**PHOTO: PTI**

- India’s economy is projected to grow by 6.5 per cent in 2024, according to a report by the UN. It noted that multinationals extending their manufacturing processes into the country to diversify their supply chains will have a positive impact on Indian exports. UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in its report released on Tuesday said that India grew by 6.7 per cent in 2023 and is expected to expand by 6.5 per cent in 2024

The UNCTAD report said the Reserve Bank of India is expected to keep interest rates constant in the near term, while restrained public consumption spending will be offset by strong public investment expenditures.

In other Southern Asian countries, however, economic growth remains more subdued. Three countries in the region – Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – are currently under IMF programmes, the conditionalities of which necessitate the application of tight monetary policies and fiscal austerity measures whose impacts are most severely felt by low-income households, it said.

Global growth is projected to be 2.6 per cent in 2024, slightly slower than the 2.7 per cent in 2023. *—PTI*

## POWER USAGE RISES 10% TO 70.66 B UNITS

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

India’s power consumption grew nearly 10 per cent year-on-year to 70.66 billion units (BU) in the first half of April this year, showing improvement in economic activities and consumption patterns, according to the Power Ministry data.

According to the data, power consumption in the country rose to 70.66 BU during 1-15 April this year from 64.24 MU in the year-ago period.

The peak power demand met or the highest supply in a day rose to about 218 GW in the first half of April compared to 206 GW in the same period a year ago.

The highest supply in a day during the entire month of April last year was about 216 GW.

The ministry has projected a peak power demand of 260 GW during the summer season (April to June) in view of longer heat wave duration. The peak power demand had touched an all-time high of 243 GW in September 2023.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted above-normal maximum temperatures in most parts of the country during summer this year. *—PTI*

**SENSEX STANDS AT 72,943.68**

## Markets slump again on fears of escalating tensions in Middle East

**MUMBAI, 16 APRIL**

**PHOTO: PTI**

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty continued to slump on Tuesday dragged down by heavy selling in IT stocks amid weak global trends and fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East.

Outflow of foreign fund also dented investors’ sentiment. Continuing its downtrend for the third day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 456.10 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 72,943.68. During the day, it slumped 714.75 points or 0.97 per cent to 72,685.03. The NSE Nifty declined 124.60 points or 0.56 per cent to finish at 22,147.90.

From the Sensex basket, Infosys, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Wipro, HCL Technologies, Bajaj Finance, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, and Larsen & Toubro were the major laggards. Titan Company, Hindustan Unilever, HDFC Bank, Maruti, ITC, Power Grid and Reliance Industries were the gainers. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.57 per cent and midcap index advanced 0.05 per cent. Among the indices, IT declined 2.32 per cent, teck (2.09 per cent), bankex (0.50 per cent), metal (0.36 per cent), capital goods (0.26 per cent) and commodities (0.24 per cent).

Energy, consumer discretionary, healthcare, industrials, consumer durables, oil & gas, and power were the gainers.

Stock markets would remain closed on Wednesday for Ram Navami.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were quoting in the red. Wall Street ended in negative territory on Monday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.26 per cent to USD 89.87 a barrel. *—PTI*

## Small-cap mutual funds’ assets up 83% to ₹2.43L cr

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

Influx of flows, upsurge in retail investors’ participation and bullish market conditions have boosted the assets for the small-cap mutual fund category to Rs 2.43 lakh crore mark at the end of March 2024. This marks an 83 per cent surge compared to the previous year.

The surge in assets was complemented by an increase in the number of investors, with the number of folios reaching 1.9 crore in March 2024 from 1.09 crore a year ago, adding an investor base of 81 lakh. This shows investors’ inclination for small-cap funds.

Gopal Kavalireddi, Vice President - Research at FYERS, said that the growth trajectory of India’s economy is attracting increased interest, leading many unlisted small-cap firms to seek support from the capital market. This trend offers promising opportunities for investors eyeing long-term growth prospects.

However, factors such as General Elections, monsoon forecasts, economic activity, inflation, GDP projections, and FY25 earnings growth are likely to influence small-cap company valuations and induce volatility in this segment, he added.

In the financial year 2023-24, small-cap funds witnessed an inflow of Rs 40,188 crore, way higher than the Rs 22,103 crore inflow seen in the preceding fiscal.

**PHOTO: PTI**

However, the month of March saw small-cap funds witnessing a net outflow for the first time in over two years at Rs 94 crore.

This came after markets regulator Sebi, in late February, raised concerns over froth building up in the small and mid-cap funds and directed mutual fund houses to put in place a framework to safeguard the interest of investors, who invested in these funds.

The concerns came in the backdrop of huge flow in the small and mid-cap schemes of mutual funds over the past few quarters. *—PTI*

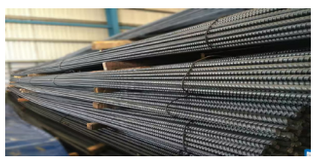


**PHOTO: PTI**

## DOMESTIC FINISHED STEEL CONSUMPTION SURGES BY 13%

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

Domestic finished steel consumption has registered a growth of 13 per cent to 136 million tonnes during 2023-24, supported by increased demand from automotive and infrastructure sectors, SteelMint India said.

The country consumed 120 million tonne (MT) finished steel in the preceding 2022-23 financial year, the research firm said in a report.

“Demand from the automotive industry improved in FY24, along with focus increasing towards the EVs. Infrastructure and construction sectors also showed resilience with investments, mostly supported by government-funded projects,” SteelMint said. The production of crude steel in the country rose 12.6 per cent to 143 MT over 127 MT in the previous fiscal. The development assumes significance as under the National Steel Policy, the government is aiming to increase India’s steel manufacturing. *—PTI*

**46% OF LEASING SPACE**

## GCCs, 3rd-party IT service driving demand for workspace: Report

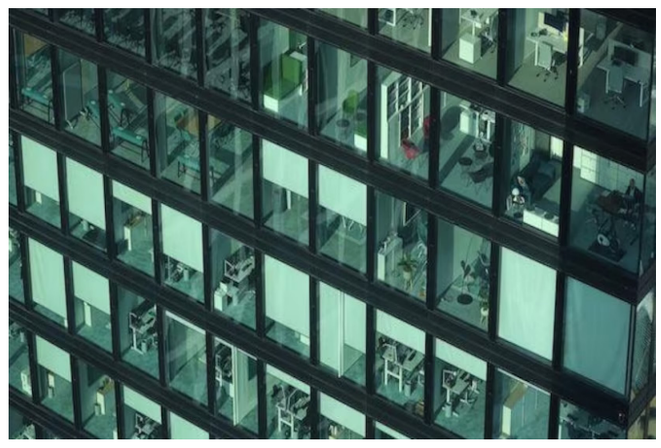
**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

International companies outsourcing jobs to India have become a major driver of office demand in the country. Global capability centres and third-party IT service providers contribute 46 per cent to the total leasing of workspace during 2023, according to Knight Frank.

Real estate consultant Knight Frank, in its latest report ‘Asia Pacific Horizon: Harnessing the Potential of Offshoring’, noted that the offshoring industry in India has grown significantly into a leading global service provider, accounting for 57 per cent of the global offshoring market.

The consultant explained that the offshoring market involves companies outsourcing business processes or services to external providers located abroad, aiming to leverage cost savings, specialised skills, and operational efficiencies.

The offshoring market, also known as Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), encompasses various models such as Global Capability Centres (GCCs) and Global Business Services (GBS).



International companies outsourcing jobs to India have become a major driver of office demand in the country **PHOTO: PTI**

- Real estate consultant Knight Frank, in its latest report ‘Asia Pacific Horizon: Harnessing the Potential of Offshoring’, noted that the offshoring industry in India has grown significantly into a leading global service provider, accounting for 57 per cent of the global offshoring market.

GCCs are internal units set up by companies in offshore locations, while the GBS involves centralised service delivery units providing a range of services globally.

“In 2023, India witnessed an overall leasing volume of 27.3 million square feet (sq ft) in the offshoring industry, marking a significant increase of 26 per cent compared to the previous year,” the report said. *—PTI*

**AHEAD OF FPO**

## *VI garners ₹5,400 cr from anchor investors*

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

Just ahead of its mega FPO opening to public investors, Vodafone Idea (VIL) has announced closure of its anchor book allocation, raising about Rs 5,400 crore from marquee global as well as domestic investors, according to a statutory filing by the telco.

This could be the third-largest anchor book after One 97 Communications and Life Insurance Corporation (LIC).

One 97 Communications and LIC had raised Rs 8,235 crore and Rs 5,627 crore in the anchor round, respectively.

In a notification to the exchanges on Wednesday, VIL said it has allotted 490.9 crore shares to 74 funds at Rs 11 apiece, which is also the upper end of the price band. This translated into a transaction size to Rs 5,400 crore.

**PHOTO: PTI**

Of the total allocation to anchor investors, 79.52 crore stocks, or 16.2 per cent of the total, were allocated to five domestic mutual fund through a total of 11 schemes.

Those who were allotted shares include GQG Partners Emerging Markets Equity Fund, Fidelity, UBS Fund Management, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, Australian Super, Troo Capital, Morgan Stanley, Citigroup Global Markets Mauritius, and Jupiter Fund Management.

Additionally, domestic investors, including Motilal Oswal Mutual Fund, HDFC Mutual Fund, SBI General Insurance and Quant Mutual Fund, were allocated shares in the anchor round.

The Rs 18,000-crore FPO of Vodafone Idea will open for public subscription on April 18 and conclude on April 22, marking the biggest FPO in the country. The price band has been set at Rs 10-11 per share.

Prior to this, the largest FPO in the Indian market was a Rs 15,000 crore share-sale by YES Bank in 2020.

The fundraise would give the ailing telco the firepower to improve its positioning in the Indian telecom market, where it currently trails larger rivals such as Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel, by a wide margin. *—PTI*

## UK inflation falls to lowest level since 2021

**LONDON, 17 APRIL**

**PHOTO: PA WIRE**

Inflation in the UK fell to its lowest level in two and a half years in March after a further easing in food prices, official figures showed on Wednesday, a development which could further pave the way for a welcome cut in interest rates soon.

Consumer prices rose by 3.2 per cent in the year to March, down from 3.4 per cent in February, the Office for National Statistics said. That’s the lowest level since September 2021.

The fall in the annual rate was not as big as anticipated. Economists had predicted a reading of 3.1 per cent for the month.

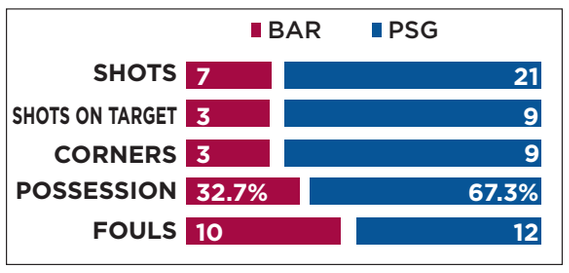
Inflation is still running higher than the Bank of England’s target of 2 per cent but the direction of the move appears clear. Inflation hit a high above 11 per cent at the end of 2022 in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which led to sharp increases in energy costs. The fall means the UK’s inflation rate is lower than the US’s for the first time in two years. In March, inflation in the US rose to 3.5 per cent. *—PTI*

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE- LEG 2

# ELEVEN MAN PSG EDGE PAST BARCA TO SEMIS

## Mbappé scores twice in the 61st and 89th minutes

PSG's Kylian Mbappe celebrates with his teammates after scoring a goal against Barcelona in Camp Nou ***PHOTO: X/PSG***




**BARCELONA, 17 APRIL**

Playing with an extra man for more than an hour, Paris Saint-Germain rallied against Barcelona to reach the Champions League semi-finals.

Mbappé scored his goals in the 61st and 89th minutes as PSG reversed its first-leg loss at home with a 4-1 win at Barcelona on Tuesday to advance 6-4 on aggregate and keep alive its hopes of a first European title in what is the France star's final season with the club.

Former Barcelona forward Ousmane Dembélé and Vitinha also scored for PSG, which took advantage of a 29th-minute red card to Barcelona defender Ronald Araujo after he fouled Bradley Barcola while trying to stop a breakaway.

"When it was 11 against 11 we were well organised. The sending off changes everything. The match changed completely," said Barcelona coach Xavi Hernández, who was later sent off himself for complaining. "We would have liked to play PSG 11 against 11. That should not have been a red card."

Barcelona had gotten off to a good start and opened the scoring with a goal by Raphinha in the 12th, but the visitors took control with the man advantage and didn't let Barcelona get back into the game.

Xavi had to replace young forward Lamine Yamal with defender Iñigo Martínez after the red card to Araujo, who was deemed by the referee to be the last defender when he fouled Barcola. PSG is back in the semifinals after two consecutive eliminations in the round of 16.

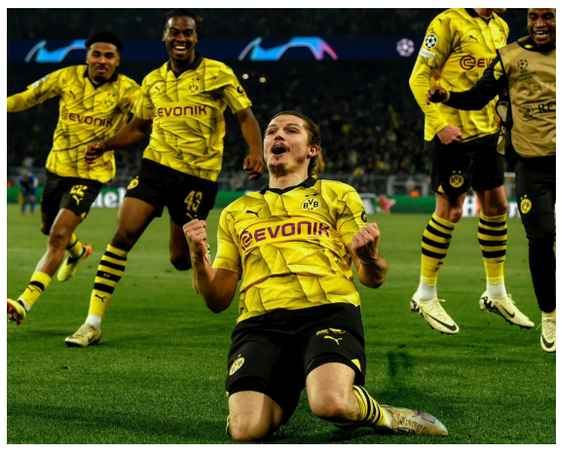
"I feel very proud," said PSG coach Luis Enrique, a former Barcelona player and coach. "We showed what we wanted to do here today. We conceded a goal, but we stayed intact mentally. We continued to play, to attack. We did everything we could to be better than Barcelona. My players showed a lot of character, a lot of enthusiasm, a lot of desire."

The France star is hoping to win what would be a first Champions League title for himself and for PSG before he leaves the club.

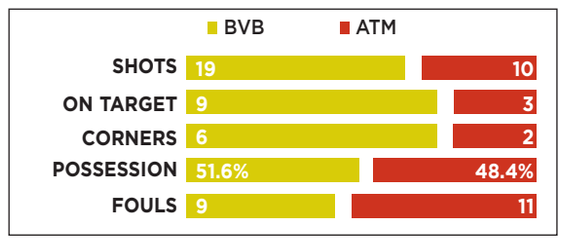
Barcelona opened the scoring in its first attack with a fortuitous goal by Raphinha after Lamine Yamal's low cross from the right side bounced off the shin of the Brazil forward and went into the net. *—AP*

# DORTMUND DIGS DEEP TO BEAT ATLÉTICO 4-2

## Dortmund reach semifinals with 5-4 aggregate win



Dortmund player Marcel Sabitzer celebrates with his teammates after scoring goal on Wednesday ***PHOTO: X/DORTMUND***




**DORTMUND, 17 APRIL**

Marcel Sabitzer scored late and set up two goals to send Borussia Dortmund into the Champions League semi-finals with a helter-skelter 4-2 win over Atlético Madrid on Tuesday.

After losing the first leg of their quarterfinal 2-1 in Madrid, Dortmund had to come from behind twice over two legs to advance 5-4 on aggregate.

Julian Brandt opened the scoring to level the tie before Sabitzer set up Ian Maatsen to give Dortmund a 2-0 lead on the night.

Atlético coach Diego Simeone responded with three changes at the break and they all paid off. A Mats Hummels own goal and goal from substitute Joaquín Correa put the Spanish side back in front on aggregate. Then Sabitzer set up Niclas Füllkrug in the 71st minute for the Germany forward's first goal after nine scoreless games, and Sabitzer scored himself three minutes later to send Dortmund into the last four.

"That was a rollercoaster, a really great evening," Dortmund chief executive Hans-Joachim Watzke said. "It's not always like that for Borussia Dortmund. The last time we were in the semifinals was in 2013. This is a great day for all Borussen." Dortmund will face Paris Saint-Germain again in the semifinals. PSG progressed to the final four with a 4-1 win at Barcelona.

"We were close to tying the game, but they were superior, and when a team is superior they should be congratulated," said Simeone, who blamed his team's elimination on wasted opportunities from the first leg when Atletico dominated but failed to build a bigger advantage.

Atlético needed goalkeeper Jan Oblak at his best. He denied Brandt, then Karim Adeyemi, before Brandt finally made the breakthrough in the 34th, firing a powerful shot in off Oblak's leg from a difficult angle after eluding former teammate Axel Witsel.

Sabitzer then combined with Maatsen, who surged past two defenders and fired the ball inside the far post in the 39th. It was the Dutch defender's first Champions League goal. But Atlético only needed four minutes after the break to level the tie when Hummels' attempted clearance of Mario Hermoso's header ended in his own net.

Correa should have scored shortly afterward when he nudged the ball wide. Simeone — dressed sharply in a black suit — flopped to the ground in frustration. *—AP*

## MotoGP racing for new momentum in America

**AUSTIN, 17 APRIL**

A new American team with ties to the NASCAR stock car series, a new television deal in the United States and upcoming American ownership. MotoGP, global motorcycle racing's version of Formula 1, looks primed for a bid to copy F1's explosive growth in recent years and bring a new group of fans — notably from the US— to the thrills of two-wheeled speed. "It has what Americans really crave or demand out of their sports: A combination of physical ability and danger," said Bobby Epstein, president of the Texas race-track Circuit of the Americas, which hosts MotoGP's only race in the US Liberty Media's purchase of Spain-based Dorna and the commercial rights to MotoGP by the end of the year has fueled speculation of what might come for a racing series anchored largely in Europe. *—AP*

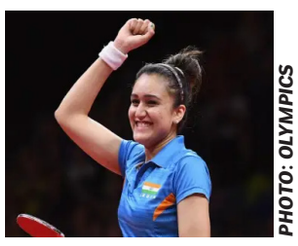


PHOTO: OLYMPICS

## Manika, Sreeja make group stage exits from ITTF WC

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

Star Indian table tennis player **Manika Batra** and her compatriot Sreeja Akula exited in the second-round group stage after losing against China's Wang Manyu and defending champion Chen Meng respectively at the ITTF World Cup in Galaxy Arena in Macau on Wednesday. World no. 39 Sreeja lost 1-3 (4-11 4-11 15-13 2-11) to reigning Olympic champion and world no. 4 Meng of China and finished second in Group 4. Manika also made an exit finishing second after losing 0-4 (6-11 4-11 9-11 4-11) against world no. 2 Manyu of China. Both the Indian players had earlier won their respective first-round group stage matches on Tuesday. There are sixteen groups in each of the men's and women's singles competition. ***—PTI***

## Punjab, MI desperate to resurrect IPL campaign

**MULLANPUR, 17 APRIL**

Punjab Kings and Mumbai Indians will be desperate to resurrect their faltering campaigns in the Indian Premier League when the two bottom-rung teams face-off here on Thursday.

Only a few decimal points separate the two teams after six matches each with Punjab's marginally better Net Run Rate of -0.218 keeping them at the seventh spot in the IPL points table, one above Mumbai Indians (-0.234).

Both Punjab and Mumbai have lost four matches each and are coming off defeats in their respective last outings, which mean pressure will be high on both the camps to get their act together. For Punjab, the challenge of getting the best out of their top order has compounded with regular skipper Dhawan being sidelined for 'seven to 10 days' due to a shoulder injury.

The only bright spot for PBKS this season has been resolute displays from their unsung Indian players Shashank Singh and Ashutosh Sharma, who both bat lower in the order and have had to make up for the shortcomings at the top more than once. The form of Prabhsimran Singh — 119 runs in six matches at 19.83 — is a concern and the same can be said for India wicketkeeper-batter Jitesh Sharma. With selection for the World Cup squad on the horizon, Jitesh, who has managed a mere 106 runs in six outings at 17.66, would be under the pump too.

The Indian pair of Arshdeep Singh (9) and Harshal Patel (7) have both been easy targets for batters. Mumbai Indians would know they have enough firepower in the camp to turn the tide but a collective effort on a consistent basis is the need of the hour. *—PTI*

Punjab Kings players during a training session ahead of the clash in Mullanpur on Wednesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

**TODAY'S MATCH**

PUNJAB KINGS vs MUMBAI INDIANS

Time: 7.30 pm

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Yadavindra Singh Cricket Stadium Punjab

## RINKU CREDITS GAMBHIR FOR NARINE'S TRANSFORMATION

**KOLKATA, 17 APRIL**

Sunil Narine opening for Kolkata Knight Riders in this IPL has proved to be a masterstroke and credit for the West Indian's move up the order should go to team mentor Gautam Gambhir, reckons Rinku Singh.

Narine smashed his maiden T20 hundred on Tuesday, a 56-ball 109 against Rajasthan Royals. His form at the top this season has been nothing short of remarkable considering he aggregated just 154 runs over the past three seasons while batting lower down the order. As an opener this season, he has already collected 276 runs in six games.

After scoring a memorable hundred at the Eden Gardens, Narine gave due credit to former captain Gambhir for making him open for the first time since 2017. In the post-match interaction, Rinku echoed Narine's words. "You can see the way Narine is batting this time. In every match, he's making runs, opening the batting and that was his (Gambhir's) idea only," Rinku said. *—PTI*

## India's T20 WC Squad: No fresh faces likely

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

BCCI ***PHOTO: BCCI***

The national selection committee is unlikely to blood any rookie IPL performer during the upcoming T20 World Cup in the Americas but a couple of tried-and-tested faces might have to brace up for disappointment when the squad is finalised by the end of this month.

With the ICC making it mandatory to announce the provisional 15-member squad by May 1 cut-off date, Ajit Agarkar and his colleagues have some straightforward choices to make if every member of the team is fit.

"There would not be any experimentation or left-field selections. All those who have played for India and have done well consistently in T20 Internationals and the IPL will be rewarded," a BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity. It is understood that one among Shubman Gill and Yashasvi Jaiswal might miss out but in case both proven performers are selected in the final 15, then only one among two finishers -- Kolkata Knight Riders' Rinku Singh and Chennai Super Kings' Shivam Dube -- will get the nod.

The other close call could be for the second wicketkeeper's slot where Sanju Samson has competition from Jitesh Sharma, KL Rahul and Ishan Kishan. Rahul and Kishan bat at the top of the order, and they haven't tried batting in the middle order in this IPL so far, which makes it difficult for the selectors to analyse their impact down the order.

Although Hardik Pandya's bowling fitness remains a concern, there is no immediate doubt on his selection. Much like him, Virat Kohli's inclusion is also a formality. It is understood that Siraj is being rested by RCB as he has been playing constantly and needed workload management.

Also, being the only left-hander in inside the top four is a novelty and in a largely unidimensional top order. However, if Gill piles up enough runs, it will be a difficult choice unless the selectors accommodate both and drop one among Shivam and Rinku from the 15. *—PTI*

## Khelo India National meet: Para-archer claims silver

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

Asian Para Games gold-winner Sheetal Devi grabbed a silver in the Khelo India NTPC National Ranking archery meet, finishing second behind Haryana's Ekta Rani, who is able-bodied and a junior world champion.

In the competition held at the DDA Yamuna Sports Complex, the 17-year-old Sheetal competed with able-bodied junior archers and lost 138-140 to Ekta in the individual compound event final.

Sheetal, who was bestowed the Arjuna award earlier this year for her two gold and a silver medal winning performance in the Hangzhou Asian Para Games, was born with a rare condition called phocomelia which makes her the first and the only international para-archery champion without arms. Sheetal believes her performance in the Khelo India event will help her prepare for the challenges ahead.

"This result will help me more going ahead in the international platforms and the Olympics," Sheetal was quoted as saying in a media release from the Sports Authority of India. "Taking part in the national ranking tournament, alongside able-bodied competitors, is giving training and competition exposure which is much-needed prior to the Olympics," said the archer's coach Abhilasha. *—PTI*

**INDIAN HOCKEY**

## *'Unity within our team continues to grow'*

**NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL**

With just 100 days remaining for the start of their journey at the Paris Olympics, the Indian men's hockey team is poised for an exhilarating quest. After clinching a historic bronze medal at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, the country's first medal after over 40 years, the team now sets its sights on the ultimate prize: a gold medal.

To turn this aspiration into reality, India faces a formidable challenge. Standing in their path are the reigning Olympic Champions, Belgium (world number two), along with tough contenders like Australia (world number three), Argentina (world number seven), New Zealand (world number 10), and Ireland (world number 12).Securing at least a top-two finish in Pool B is imperative to progress to the quarter-finals. Meanwhile, Pool A comprises the world's top-ranked team, the Netherlands, alongside Germany, Great Britain, Spain, South Africa, and hosts France, setting the stage for an intense battle in the 12-team men's hockey tournament at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Harmanpreet Singh in action ***PHOTO: ANI***

According to press release, the Indian Men's Hockey Team will begin their campaign on 27 July against New Zealand, followed by a match against Argentina on 29 July, before facing Ireland and Belgium on 30 July, and 1 August. They will play their last group stage game against the mighty Australians on 2 August.*—ANI*